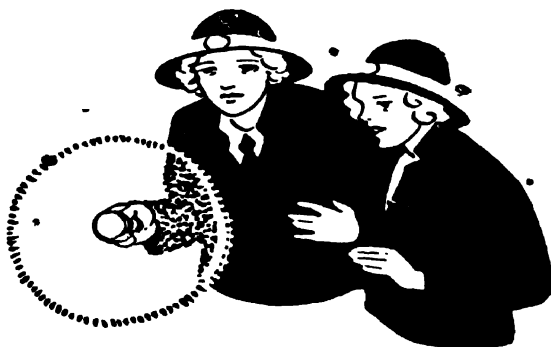




"Tell me if the gypsies gave you that necklace?" (p. 144)

THE TERM OF MANY ADVENTURES

MAY WYNNE



Illustrated by Robert F. C. Waudby



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LONDON EDINBURGH PARIS MELBOURNE
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1874

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Arch. No. 3386

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THE TERM OF MANY ADVENTURES



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCES SARA

"SOME coach!" chuckled Sara as she fell sideways against the girl in the next seat who, seemingly, was a stranger and stolid. •

Anyway, she didn't see the joke of having her hat

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knocked off and her book tipped under the seat. She stared at Sara, who grinned, but the new girl did not grin back—she foraged for her book.

“I can’t think why Topsy wanted to leave Sussex,” complained a weary voice. “We were all quite happy there. No chance of visitors up here in Northumberland. It’s world’s end.”

A prolonged giggle from various parts of the coach answered the speaker. Sara was consoling.

“It’s not Northumberland, darlint, it’s Scotland. ‘Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace,’ you know. I adore the thought of it. Gaby was there for the move, as her parents couldn’t be bothered with her during the hols. Not that Gaby minded. She sent me a priceless p.c., and says that Culloch House is all that fancy can paint it and a deal more. In fact, that on the very eve of our arrival she will make our marrow creep and our soul thrill with the joy of adventure.”

“So like Gaby,” groaned the weary one; “she’d make high adventure out of a mouse hunt. I only hope we have tea before she carries us off.”

“*Pig!*” said Sara, and heard Miss Dane’s stern voice from the other end of the coach calling her to order.

It was too dark to see much of the wild scenery through which they were passing, and the thirty girls, tucked somehow into the big motor coach, would not have been too interested, at the moment, in foaming torrent and mountain peak. They were

too full of their own concerns, babbling of the summer holidays, of the girls who had left, the girls—unknown and practically unseen as yet—who had come. Then, of course, all important: the new school with its hint of romance, its loveliness, the thrill of the long journey.

Last, but not least, the whispered speculation as to the “govs.”

“Shame that Miss Dean has left,” said the weary one—Wanda Earle. “She was a sport, though she had a rotten way of making favourites. I wonder who the new English mistress will be.”

“Gaby mentioned it,” replied Sara, who appeared to be well posted in news. “She says the good soul came to be interviewed, and she heard Winks telling cook about her afterwards. She’s a widow.”

“Help,” laughed another voice, “that is a stunt. Don’t like widows. They’re sly, or else always mourning over the late lamented. Hallo-o! Here we are.”

How they crowded. But Miss Dane, the head English governess, was an “old soldier” with regard to discipline, and launched her crew safely from the interior of the coach into the brightly lighted hall where Mrs. Hinford, the Head, was waiting to welcome them.

What an excitement it was! All eyes were busy looking round in admiration and some awe at the

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vast hall, with its polished floor, its panelled walls, and wide staircase.

There was romance in the atmosphere of this ancient Jacobean House, and the girls, with few exceptions, sensed and loved it.

"I—I hope there are no ghosts," whispered little Cherry Perkins to Sara, who laughed and cuddled her.

"Of course not," said Sara; "and if there were, thirty jolly schoolgirls would soon send them scampering. Isn't the Head a peach, having tea in the hall as if we were grown-ups. And scones—Scotch scones. Hurrah for Culloch House! And *there's* Gaby at last!"

A plump, merry-looking girl with bobbed hair and pale-grey eyes was wriggling through the crowd to reach her pals.

The indifference of her family did not trouble Gaby, who would not have been recognized without her grin.

"Hallo, people," she greeted Sara and Wanda, "where is Sylvia? No matter. Come into yon far corner and hear the news."

"No," said Sara firmly, "tea first, thrills after. I have my eye on those scones. By the same token, who is giving the right hand of fellowship to the three forlorn ones over there?"

"We don't want new goods," protested Gaby. "I tell you I'm going to make your hair stand . . ."

But Sara had slithered off to collect the three new-comers who stood looking helplessly around.

One was the stolid lassie of the coach, the others obviously sisters and dressed alike in nondescript garb.

Sara was observant, though her own appearance deceived many. She *looked* almost angelic and quite Puritan with her fair plaits, her serene expression, her blue eyes—the eyes of a dreamer and of an enthusiast.

She beamed on the three strangers.

“You are new, aren’t you?” she said briskly. “Never mind names. Come over to our table and we’ll put you wise.”

She took gratitude for granted, though it was not apparent, and led the way back—to find the two sisters alone had responded.

The sturdy one remained, gripping her bag, her face expressing mild disgust with the situation.

Sara giggled. It was her misfortune that she always saw the funny side of things.

“She ought to be named Oliver Cromwell,” she murmured beneath her breath. But she left O.C. to fend now for herself.

The sisters presented possibilities, though at first obviously shy and hungry. No one could long be shy in Sara’s company, or hungry when confronted by oatmeal scones and honey.

Sara talked chiefly to Gaby, who remained mysterious.

Wanda, always depressed, warned Sara that Gaby Rayne was noted for her mare's-nests.

After they had done justice to the scones and received the hint direct that Gaby had secrets to tell, Sara turned to her protégées.

"You'll have to be sorted out," she said as though speaking of the washing. "Miss Barker will be getting her claws into you. If you want to know about anything come to me." Then she laughed. "My name is Sara Elcott," she added, "and . . ."

"I'm Mary Ann," said the younger of the girls, a freckled, eager-eyed lassie of fourteen. "Mary Ann Mardeen. My sister's name is Pernillia—we call her Penny."

The elder girl blushed crimson. Evidently her unusual Christian name was a trouble to her.

Sara smiled brightly.

"What a jolly name," she said. "I've never heard it before. *Pernillia*. Is it foreign?"

"Not exactly," said the more talkative Mary Ann; "it's gipsy. Mother and dad were staying in the north of Scotland when Penny was born, and dad saved a gipsy child's life, so the mother begged for the baby's name to be Pernillia. She said it would be lucky, and she hung a charm round Penny's neck. Show it them, Penn."

Penny obeyed. She was not the least like her sister, being exceedingly pretty, with violet eyes and red-brown curls.

She pouted a little as she held out to Sara the quaint old coin in the shape of a hand, with many hieroglyphics.

"It's not brought *me* much luck," she grumbled, "though dad and mother say it ~~is~~ frightfully good of Mrs. Hinford to have us here. I don't think it is really good at all. I—I'd rather——"

"Shut up, Penny," urged Mary Ann with the greatest good nature. "We *are* here, and we're going to enjoy life tremendously. The Wilmot-Grahams to whom the house belonged are some sort of relation," she added to Sara, "that's why dad wanted us to come, though they are as poor as we or they would not have sold Culloch House."

A flush burned in Penny Mardeen's cheeks.

"I *hate* being poor," she whispered, "I *hate* it. [—I'd give anything—or *do* anything to be rich."

Gaby looked at the speaker with interest. She had overheard the softly spoken words.

"I wouldn't say that if I were you," she retorted; "this is such an awfully old house, it *might* be devil-haunted. Houses and places are sometimes, you know, and the devil catches up what people say about being—er—ready to sell their souls for things, and he planks down the things and—er—takes the souls. What, what."

Sara was choking.

"Don't, Gaby," she urged, "and—er—if you and Wanda want to have a chat, we might biff off, eh?"

Penny Mardeen was biting her lip angrily. Of course she didn't understand Gaby, who never knowingly made a joke, but who kept comrades in convulsions of laughter.

"I don't know as much about devils as *you* seem to do," flared Penny. "Come along, Mary Ann, we may as well go back to where we were."

Gaby looked regretfully after the two shabby figures.

"I *am* sorry," she sighed, "it was only meant as a warning. She looked so deadly, horribly, in earnest about hating poverty, I wanted to cheer her up."

"Some people won't *be* cheered," retorted Sara, "but come awa, my true love, and roam the woods—I mean rooms—with me. Gracious! before I've been long in Culloch House I shall be a poetess. Coming, Wanda?"

"I may as well," grumbled Wanda, "since if I'm not there to shed a little common sense over the proceedings, you'll be falling down the Castle well, if there is one, or——"

"Hist," gurgled Gaby, "don't forget this is not a Castle but a House. It's more. It's a House with a History, and was built in the—er—sixteenth century by one of the jolly old Graemes. Not Claversee—he belongs to another house. But what consarns *us* is not the house but the topping passage which leads out of it. "A simple secret, ladies, but mine own."

"Don't rag," ordered Sara, "but lead on. I

feel, after such a journey, such a tea, and such a house, that I could dare all. This is going to be a term of terms, but we must not hustle. Wanda agrees with me."

Wanda snorted.

"Seeing you are the greatest hustler yourself," said she.

CHAPTER II

A FIRST DISCOVERY

“**W**HAT should we do without flashlights ?” said Sara contentedly. “I don’t mind risking miraculous escapes down into dismal depths, but to tread on a toad would rob me of my zeal for ever. Bear up, Wanda ; don’t you know this is romance ?”

Wanda groaned.

“Idiots,” she said, “and I’m the biggest. Gaby, we’ll flay you if this is one of your usual——”

“It’s not,” replied Gaby placidly, “it’s most unusual. Another flight, bit chilly, isn’t it ? I ought to have got you a respirator, Wanda. Now, here we are ; below the cellars, in a dim and dismal dungeon.”

“Don’t tell *me*,” mocked Sara, “it’s where the W.G.’s used to keep their beer and whisky. Hallo !”

“Don’t mock,” said Gaby. “Didn’t I tell you.”

And she held her flashlight so that it disclosed what looked at first sight to be a cobwebby wall which had once been painted a dull brick red.

Gaby tapped it significantly.

“Hollow as a drum,” said she. “Look at this.”

She inserted her fingers into a gap between the

seeming bricks and jerked back. There was a grating sound and a steel door slid slowly back, showing an inner door. Gaby pushed, and with a melancholy creaking of hinges the door swung back, showing a flight of stairs.

"They lead down," said Gaby, "into a passage, and the passage leads out into a cave close to a ruin which might have been a chapel or something of the kind. It is in a wood, a perfectly scrumptious wood, the very ideal place for a midnight picnic or excursion. Would you like to come? If so, keep close and don't talk. Imagine you are Jacobite fugitives escaping from George's men. Don't you love it?"

Sara chuckled.

"For once," she said, "in a long career you are better, Gaby, than your words."

Even Wanda failed to croak.

"Allow me," said Gaby serenely, "to introduce you to the Wood of Mysteries. I feel sure there are werewolves, witches, and wickedness to haunt the scene. At present, there are blackberries, big and juicy. Tiptoe, faire ladyes, and watch for the Fairy Queen."

Arm-in-arm they tramped through golden-green bracken, watching the moonbeams at play amongst the foxgloves, and brambles where blackberries hung in tempting profusion.

"I love moonlight," said Sara, "and, of course, we are made for life, with a secret passage through

which to wander at nightfall and hear the nightingale——”

“Bosh!” said Wanda. “Nightingales don’t sing north of the Tweed.”

“Owls hoot, ‘hen,” retorted Sara; “and this, O Gaby, is the chapel. I thought we climbed into it from the passage.”

“So we ought,” said Gaby. “I was waiting for you to stop gassing. You see, at least *I* see, there must be two passages like a fork, one runs into the wood through that small cave, and the other into the chapel. What do you think of it all?”

“Scrum,” said Wanda, “though I don’t quite know what that man is thinking of *us*. Do you see him, by the fallen log? He looks like a Romany lad, and I’m not quite sure that I admire his appearance.”

The three had come to a halt and were peeping cautiously in the direction indicated by Wanda.

A man *was* crouching there—black-eyed, suntanned, resentful in expression. He rose on seeing he was discovered and hurried away; in fact, he was in such haste to be gone that he did not see the fleeing forms of the school heroines, who did not pause to take breath till they were back in the “dungeon” with the door fast closed.

“He looked like the vil—villain in the play,” panted Sara, “but I wish we had screwed our courage to the sticking point. It was great, Gaby,



"Keep close and don't talk."

and we shall have a term bulging with romance. But I'll tell you what. We'd better make Periwinkle—I mean Pernillia—our mascot, and if she sees any gipsy heroes she can wave her talisman under their noses and we shall be famous. Nothing like a friend in camp."

She was thinking how overtures of friendship

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should be made to the new girls who already intrigued her.

It was a decided shock to find that instead of the dainty cubicle which had been hers in Sussex, where Mrs. Hinford's school had been famed for being up-to-date in every sense, she was sharing a small wainscoted chamber, with latticed window, open hearth—and a companion already seated on the side of her bed unfastening her shoes.

"Great Cæsar's ghost," whispered Sara in dismay, "if it isn't Oliver Cromwell!"

The new girl was evidently not deaf; low as the whisper was, she heard and turned.

"My name," she replied, "is *not* Oliver Cromwell. It is Mogs Gordon. In the dim past of fifteen years ago I was named Margaret, but no one recognizes me by that name now. One other word. I'm at school with a purpose, but not for making friends. I prefer my own company, but I have to put up with yours. I ask nothing and I give nothing. That's all right. You can call me what you like; it won't worry me. I never quarrel, and I don't talk. Does that suit you? You can call me Oliver Cromwell too, if you think it's funny. I rather like it. He was much more of a hero than your sneaking old Jacobites."

Sara stood, arms akimbo, her eyes wide in surprise. When the new girl had finished Sara laughed, quite a friendly laugh.

"You got it off your chest jolly well," she replied, "and of course you can do absolutely what you like. As you wish it, I'll try and forget you are here, but do jog my memory when you wish to. I can't agree about the Jacobites, but I like Oliver too, he was so straight."

Then without attempting any more conversation she turned to her trunk and began unpacking.

She had an idea that Mogs was watching. She also had an idea that Mogs was homesick and resenting school; but she really did understand a little about character, and she never so much as looked in the direction of Mogs again, though she noted in passing her chest of drawers a photo of six boys, evidently brethren, with Mogs in the midst.

"Bossed her brothers," thought Sara. "Sort of queen amongst them; thinks girls are soppy and silly. By the end of term she'll be suffering from nervous breakdown, or be quite a solid pal. She and Wanda would be perfect at a sparring match. There'd have been murder if they'd shared this room."

Then she ran downstairs to hear more news from Gaby, who was at her best when strictly confidential.

Gaby was waiting in a room which ought to have been reserved for lovers, roses, and mysterious duels. The bookshelves containing a school library looked quite out of place. Gaby in her blue serge dress was equally out of place. Sara sensed all that, but still smiled.

"We all have our burdens," she said cheerfully. "Miss Barker simply loves making misfits all round in choosing stable companions. Mogs and I have a perfect room, and I gather she hates school, hates other girls, and would like to live on a desert island with her six brothers, and keep white rats and guinea pigs, and be pursued by sharks and wild men of the woods. Being at Culloch House instead, she becomes an oyster and will not respond."

Gaby chuckled.

"I have the sisters," said she. "I think Mary Ann is possible, but Pernillia has poverty on the brain—and might become quite criminal if she saw a chance for wealth. Mary Ann shuts her up at the least signs of an outbreak. We must cultivate Mary if she will be parted from her Penny, who is not worth a farthing to us. In the meantime I have news. Real news, my honey. The new gov is a widow named Lysden, and she brings with her a son aged four—an angelic morsel called Barry. If things go on at the present rate I shall call it Topsy's Turvy Term if that's sense."

Sara shook her head.

"I've got so many things to digest and reflect on," she said, "that I feel it will be absolutely impossible to concentrate on lessons to-morrow. If the Head were human she would give us a whole holiday to settle under new conditions, eh?"

Gaby stretched long arms wide.

"Telepathy," she said, "or is it the obvious thought? Miss Dane is regretfully announcing the very same thing, adding her own little slogan about working at double pressure, top-speed, when we do begin."

"The Head," said Sara solemnly, "was born to this work; she knows girl-nature. I shall end this term crowned with laurels—or is it bay?—to show my appreciation."

The door opened as she spoke. It was Miss Barker, the matron, showing the new governess round.

The two girls stood up smiling. They were not the least shy and they liked the look of this pleasant-faced but sad-eyed woman in grey, who held a small boy wearing a blue jersey suit by the hand.

"What a nice room," said Mrs. Lysden. "Thank you for showing me round, Miss Barker; if I may I'll stay here and ask these new friends to show me my way if I forget."

Gaby came forward at once.

"You are Mrs. Lysden," she said, shaking hands. "I expect we shall be in your classes, and we *will* try to learn our lessons---sometimes."

She added the last word so comically that Mrs. Lysden had to laugh.

"Barry is quite bewildered," she said, "with so many girls, and is looking vainly for a littlest boy to keep him company."

Barry chirped in then. He was a handsome little lad, with great blue eyes and fair curls.

"I like *vese* girls," he announced unexpectedly, "and I don't want to play with *any* ovvers."

That was good enough. Gaby and Sara were in their element playing with the small hero, and after watching them with a smile Mrs. Lysden slipped away on a voyage of discovery for his nursery.

On her return she found Sara acting as hare whilst Barry and Gaby pursued her over chairs and stools in frantic mirth. Barry was carried off protesting loudly that he didn't like bed, and he was sure great big hound bow-wows did *not* go to bed so early.

The girls remaining behind laughed together, but Sara fell to musing.

"How sad she looked," she said. "Don't grin, Gaby; I can't explain what I mean, but she *does* suit this mysterious old house, for she looks as if she had had a lot of sorrow—and didn't want any one to know what it was."

"In that case," said Gaby with a regretful sigh, "I suppose we ought *not* to try and find out."

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE COMPANION

EVIDENTLY Mogs Gordon meant to be as good—or as bad—as her word.

She hardly addressed a word to Sara that night or next morning. Sara did not attempt to break the ice, it rather amused her to watch and see how long this defiant mood was likely to last, or how “Oliver Cromwell” would fare at the hands of the governesses.

Gaby, however, had more to report about her room-mates.

“I sighed for my cubicle in the old quarters,” said Gaby, “but the sisters aren’t too bad. I don’t care for the Periwinkle—I *can’t* remember her name. She has a grouse against life—and poverty. Mary Ann has, however, so sat on her elder that Penny is squashed. Mary Ann wants to join us and I don’t see why not. Sylvia has left—lucky bean! Gone to India to a tea plantation. So Mary Ann can come along, eh? Wanda will grumble because it’s the nature of the beast, but there are no flies on Mary Ann, she’s intelligent and observant. She tells me she has two ambitions in life. To see a

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ghost and write a book. I told her to start with the ghost, it would be more paying. Now what about it? Shall we explore the regions around or the premises? I've done the latter, and I think you saw the best of it last evening. There's a nice old cook, her husband does the odd jobs. Verra Scotch and verra grieved that the family has gone. She owned after a time that she dreaded seeing a pack of lassies running around Culloch House, but I did my best to prove that we were not tailless monsters. I think we'll find Kirstie useful. She'll have all the legends and the gossip of the county to tell when she ceases to be 'suspeecious.' "

They trailed Wanda, who had unearthed the picture gallery, now to be playroom for thirty girls.

Wanda was pensive.

"I couldn't find any secret door or the baleful picture of a wicked ancestor," she sighed, "but there are several nice old books amongst the usual tosh in the library. I'd hoped there might be a family ghost included in the make-up. Failing that, let's go out and pick blackberries, mushrooms, brains—if there are any—and watch one of the great ones, Meriel Sallerton or Miss Alys for choice, being chased by a mad bull whilst we sit on the fence and play heroine at the last moment."

The speaker did not show any great pleasure at hearing Mary Ann was to be added to their number.

"I suppose if it's fixed it is fixed," she sighed,

"but on your life *not* Penny-a-liner. She depresses me at once. I don't know why; I think it must be the gipsy charm. Why should *she* have it when I should make far better use of it?"

"How?" asked Sara, but Wanda refused to say.

Mary Ann was at first overjoyed, then doubtful, when she had her invitation.

"Penny will think I have deserted her," she said.

"Not a bit of it," retorted Sara. "I saw her talking to Oliver Cromwell; they are so frightfully unlike that they will probably chum. Come on."

And Mary Ann came on.

The neighbourhood around Culloch House was certainly enchanting to schoolgirls. They were allowed to go out in batches of four, and possessed themselves of baskets before starting.

"If you," said Gaby, with fine consideration, to Mary Ann, "are thinking of writing a book, you may as well keep our Annals. For instance, we are *bound* to have adventures to-day, and you can record them, but only mention S.P. in cipher."

Mary Ann was not so simple as she looked.

"All right," she agreed, "and I shan't give you the key of the cipher either."

"You can start right away with your Annals," called Wanda, who was in advance. "We are going across the field down to the river—and there's a bull looking at us already."

How they laughed, and how they ran too when

the cow, all innocent of evil, showed an inquiring mind.

"Stepping stones," said Gaby contentedly, "a waterfall, and woods. I think these are nut trees, and there's no wall or fence to shut us out. Wanda, you may lead the way."

"You *would* say that as I can't swim," grumbled Wanda, and Mary Ann looked at her in surprise. She had not quite grasped the fact that Wanda was the best of sports and boon companions, and only grumbled because that was her rôle—a species of leg-pulling to hide the very marrow of a pal.

There were nuts ripe and ready; the girls were ready too, and the wood was so fascinating with its deep dells, its autumn glories, scarlet rowan-berries, and quiet pools.

"A wall," said Gaby, "and a house, dark, mysterious, and ancient. Might be a witches' dwelling, and I don't expect any one lives there. It looks, too, like murders and plottings. Shall we climb, eh? At worst we *could* say we were strangers in the land."

"They don't seem to have gardeners," said Wanda, leading the way, "but I thought I heard a dog bark."

"No matter," said Gaby, "I'll keep behind you. It is a spiffing old place. Get out your notebook, Mary Ann. Start something like this:

"The dripping of the heavy dew from the trees

around, the mournful howling of the dog, alone broke the ominous silence. The house itself, mirk as midnight, had the sinister appearance which suggests crime. A haunting evil brooded——’ ”

“ Shut up,” urged Sara, suddenly alert. “ No humbug, girls ; that dog has been set free. We don’t want to be torn to mincemeat. Be ready to climb. . . . Oh ! ”

The little group drew closer in sudden panic.

A man had come into view, approaching quickly down the glade, holding by its collar a great Dane, brindled, massive.

The man wore a green turban and long dark robe ; he was evidently an Indian, dark and bearded ; his black eyes were fixed on the intruders with no friendly glance whilst the hound strained forward growling in equal menace.

Sara stepped forward quickly, her pulses were racing, but she held her head high and spoke without waiting for the man to do so.

“ Are we trespassing ? ” she asked. “ I am sorry. We belong to the school, and do not know the neighbourhood.”

She spoke slowly, glad to see that the man understood.

He bowed with a fine dignity when she had finished, and caressed the head of the hound as though to soothe its resentment.

“ The Missie-Babas from Culloch House ? ” he

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said. "Yes—yes. But not come over wall again. The sahib ill . . . never sees visitors. Never, never. The Missie-Babas escape from Sultan this time, but the dog dangerous. The Missie-Babas go away never come where not wished for sahib angry next time. Missie-Babas are ladies, and will not insult."

"Of course not," said Sara, blushing furiously. "Will you tell your master we apologize. We just saw a wall . . . and climbed . . ."

The Indian was not interested in excuses. He satisfied himself that the girls were not likely to come again, and led them to a side gate, which he unlocked, still keeping a retentive hand on Sultan's collar.

Not that Sultan would have any longer wished to make mincemeat of Mustog Ali's friends. He understood that they were quite respectable and Sara had improved the acquaintance by sly caresses and long glances into those strange, far-seeing eyes.

"He ought to be called the Sphinx," she whispered to Gaby as they turned away after a shy word of thanks to the Indian, who took no further notice of them as he stood, tall, slender, mysterious, holding Sultan by the collar, framed in the ancient doorway.

"A pity," sighed Sara, "it might have been the beginning instead of the end of an adventure. I am sure the master must be something or some one with a history. Let's follow the wall and see if there is a front entrance."

In this case perseverance was rewarded. There *was* a front entrance, quite in keeping with the note of mystery. Heavy iron gates guarded the weed-grown path—or rather road—leading to the scarcely seen house. The fine scroll-work on the gates was green with verdigris, but to the surprise of the girls the smaller side door yielded to their touch.

“Some one has been paying the mystery man a visit,” whispered Sara. “Look . . . there she is, crossing the path over there, close to the house.”

The four girls crowded together, staring in growing wonder as they recognized Mrs. Lysden the new governess standing outside the front door as though awaiting an answer to her summons. Not a word did the watchers speak. Of course, they knew they ought not to be here, that they were not only watching but spying. Yet curiosity, so often the foe to honour, kept them there whilst the door slowly swung open and they again saw the figure of the Indian.

Would he turn her away? Of course he would. Had he not just said his sick master saw no one? And yet the door remained open! The man stepped back and the visitor passed within, the door closing behind her.

“Well, I’m *jiggered*!” said Sara solemnly.

CHAPTER IV

A FRESH MYSTERY

"I DON'T *think*," said Sara as the four girls walked slowly back through the wood, "that you had better put the first adventure in the Annals, Mary Ann. We can talk about it later on, but we have got to know more about things first. You see, it may be that we have tumbled on some one's secret, and if so, it would be rather mean, wouldn't it ? to put it—well, not *in* print but in writing."

"I'll start from the next adventure," said Mary Ann cheerfully. "The first one *was* rather nice."

"I don't agree," retorted Wanda heavily. "I can't bear sinister people. That man looked as though he might be a Thug ; you know, the Indians who years and years ago used to strangle people with a thin strip of silk."

"Beastly !" said Gaby. "What an awful thing it will be if he strangles Mrs. Lysden. Ought we to go back and rescue her ?"

Sara's eyes twinkled.

"She might be one of a secret gang," she retorted. "The invalid gentleman must be a fake or she would not have been admitted. We shall have

to consider the situation. In the meantime we'll ask some one the name of the house."

"There's a boy," said Mary Ann, pointing; "he's fishing. We can ask him."

They approached, not realizing their combined attack would be unwelcome to the fisher, who was breathlessly watching the evolutions of a trout around his hook when Gaby said:

"Hallo!"

He was evidently a lad with strong self-control, for he said not one word as he saw trout and hopes depart in the whisk of a tail, leaving him to look round at four unashamed damsels who were innocent of offence.

"Can you," asked Sara, smiling sweetly, "tell us the name of the old grey house amongst the trees?"

Alec Fannock looked from one to the other. He was fair, with a nice face and honest eyes. He was not the least shy, and he would have spoken a word of reproach had it not been for interest in their question.

"What, the Stone House?" he asked. "Have you been in?"

Sara was spokeswoman and told the story, combining an introduction.

The lad—he was round about fifteen or more—grinned in enjoyment.

"So you got warned off?" he commented.

"Same here. Same everywhere. My dad was worried over it. He's minister of the little grey kirk above the village. My name is Alec—Alec Fannock. My mother is dead, so dad and I are on our own with old Janet to look after us. The manse is quite close to the kirk. We hear Culloch House is a girls' school. It's very sad."

He had just the faintest accent which was quite charming. The last words were heartfelt.

Sara became sympathetic.

"Rotten," she agreed, "from *your* point of view and the Wilmot-Grahams' point of view; but, of course, it's tremendously nice for us. If you're the minister's son you'll be able to tell us lots, but I suppose *you* want to fish?"

"No," said Alec heroically, "I don't expect I'll get another bite. Did you *want* to know about the tenant of the Stone House? He calls himself Mr. Brown—Mr. Felix Brown—but he sees no one at all, and he has no servants excepting Mustog Ali, who talks English awfully well and does all the shopping. He pays ready money, too, and has the best of everything. Dr. M'Gregor called when he heard Mr. Brown was an invalid, but he was no luckier than the rest of us. So it's a check to curiosity."

"What a pity," sighed Gaby. She was thinking what a pity it was honour forbade her telling this nice lad that their new governess had been admitted into the sanctum.



"Can you tell us the name of the old grey house?"

"We think Culloch is adorable," Sara was telling him, "and we have a whole holiday, so that we can learn more about it. We *are* glad we have met you. Are you having holidays too?"

He flushed at the direct question.

"No," he said, holding his head a trifle higher; but my father cannot afford the school fees, so

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he teaches me himself. I have my lessons before breakfast and then till dinner-time. But to-day is a whole holiday as my father had to go on business to the Castle."

Wanda felt she had the right to ask the next question.

"Is there a castle?" she asked. "We thought Culloch House was *the* grand place of the neighbourhood. Is the Castle grander?"

Alec laughed.

"Much grander, and just as old," he replied. "I'll be thinking it is much *older*. The Frasers lived there for centuries, but it happened to them as it happened to the Wilmot-Grahams. They have no money and they love modern life. So they sold the Castle and went to London. The people who are there now made a fortune in steel and aeroplanes. Their name is Mingleton; they are very friendly. Sir Horace is clever, and dad likes him a lot. There are two sons, Peter and Paul. They are twins, and they are having six months' holiday before going to college. I think they are nineteen, but I have not seen them very often. It is my own fault, but—it was no use. I am four years younger, and I am not interested in what they are interested."

"Thank you," said Sara. "You must think we are terrors, asking you so many questions, but we are awfully grateful. I hope we shall be pals. Topsy—I mean Mrs. Hinford—is very good. She says

she trusts her girls and gives them room to develop. That means if we tell her about you on the square, she will let us be pals. See ? ”

Alec did see, and, on the whole, he was rather pleased. These girls seemed such jolly sports—unlike the girls he had seen in the big motor cars belonging to the wealthier neighbours.

Not that he had spoken to those red-lipped, berouged girls of fashion. He liked his fishing, his rambles, and his humble friends. He was proud too, and—dad was poor. He was happier, he would say, without patronage. Money was not of vast interest to him. He wished life could always be spent as at present—at Culloch Manse with his comrade father.

Yet these girls were young. And, for the first time, youth called to youth from beyond the narrow circle of the village.

“ I hope we shall be pals,” he said ; “ and, if so, I’ll show you all the haunts I love. There are many romances in Culloch.”

“ And ghosts, and mysteries,” breathed Sara. “ I am glad we came to Culloch-House.”

Alec was frowning, not at them, though ; and, as they followed the direction of his gaze they were surprised to see the tall form of a gipsy woman, grey-haired, with wrinkled features and masculine bearing, who stood in the shadow of the trees.

“ That is Mother Judith,” said Alec. “ She is one of the Smiths, a gipsy family. There are Smiths

and Shoemiths, Lees and Fosters, who have haunted the border for centuries. Sometimes they disappear for years—it is almost as though they had gone on a pilgrimage; but they always come back. Some people say gipsy-town is hidden not far from Culloch. The secret has been kept for centuries. If a *Giorgian* finds the town which lies under the moon he or she is killed; or, if not, sworn to secrecy and to clanship. They too become gipsies.”

“We won’t look for gipsy-town, then,” said Gaby firmly. “We love adventures, but not the sort that ‘end sadly ever after.’ So we’ll keep a ‘look-out’ for sport above ground.”

“Then don’t trouble to get acquainted with Mother Judith,” smiled Alec. “She is a great personage—and I’ve heard it said—a great enemy.”

The dinner-bell was ringing when the girls got in.

What a merry dinner-party it was, too. *Some* one had been busy, and cook had been kind, so there were mushrooms to eat with the roast mutton, and blackberry and apple puddings, which had the special charm of having the fruit supplied by the eaters.

Sara and her chums had managed to “wangle” seats together, and to the little coterie was added a half-reluctant Mary Ann, who accepted the honour since Pernillia seemed to have been improving her morning by getting to know two girls who were sitting on her left, the silent Mogs upon her right.

Oliver Cromwell, Sara noticed, was not one to speak at meal-times, nor did she look in a particularly holiday mood.

Sara's attention was chiefly given to Mrs. Lysden and Barry. The latter, seated between his mother and Mademoiselle, was an example to the girls in regard to table manners, but his eyes, full of eager inquiry, roved in all directions, meeting the friendliest of smiles.

Evidently Barry would not lack devotees !

But—his mother ?

She had come unscathed from that mysterious visit, but she certainly seemed to have had a trying time, judging by appearances. Her eyes had such a tired look in them ; she was pale and scarcely ate anything.

To Sara, student in character, she appeared to be a woman who, just for the time, has found life too hard, some problem too difficult, and so stepped back in the despair which cries " Let it drift. I can do nothing more." •

" I *do* wonder," thought Sara, " what's wrong. It must be desperate, and . . . I believe I would like to help if I could. She looks young—and alone ; but I don't suppose she wants any one to interfere."

CHAPTER V

NEW FRIENDS

LESSONS began in earnest next day. Miss Dane made that quite clear.

Poor Miss Dane ! She was a great disciplinarian, and she was not at all sure she approved Mrs. Hinford's experiment in breaking away from the orthodox, up-to-date lines of the modern girl school and bringing her thirty lassies out into the wilds to develop.

There were to be no prefects. *This* was revolutionary ! And even Miss Alys, prepared to back her mother through thick and thin, was doubtful of the wisdom of it.

Girls who had been prefects in the conventional school in Sussex would resent being robbed of their authority.

But Mrs. Hinford knew her own mind.

"The system *has* its advantages," she agreed, "in teaching girls responsibility. But life teaches us that mistakes and unhappiness, failures of all kinds, arise from responsibilities being shouldered

before minds are trained and character established.

"In school life I feel, after past experience, this too easily assumed responsibility is hurtful both to rulers and ruled. It creates that masterful spirit which we see bringing chaos in adult life. To be a ruler one must learn more perfectly to be ruled. The latter is the essential in school life.

"And the wise ruler is a man or woman of experience. The prefects have not the experience or the tact. Nor has life taught them sympathy with the erring, judgment tempered by the circumstances and the home life.

"I should never again use the system of prefects. I consider it is a shelving of responsibility, and often an attempt on the part of the headmistress to give herself and her paid staff a better and easier time."

And so, whatever her listeners thought, the reign of prefects was over, to the immense satisfaction of the school at large and juniors in particular.

But if Mrs. Hinford robbed prefects of authority, she gave to every senior of fifteen and over the right to go out for rambles and walks if accompanied by two comrades.

It was a matter of trust, and the headmistress said plainly that if it were abused the delinquent would be placed within bounds.

Any reasonable request for licence would be granted.

"I want my girls to be happy and healthy," she told them, "and to feel that even the youngest junior is responsible for the honour of a school where the motto is 'Faith and Loyalty.' I have faith in you. I claim loyalty from you."

Mary Ann was seated next to her sister as the girls listened to the speech, and as Mrs. Hinford concluded she noticed that a tall, handsome girl leaned towards Penny and whispered, "What a hope!"

And Mary Ann, who had thrilled at the brief speech, followed Penny into the playing-fields with anxiety in her eyes, for though Pernillia was the elder by a year, Mary Ann had always been the leader and adviser.

"Who *were* those other girls, Penny?" she asked breathlessly as she cornered her senior. "The one who spoke to you was awfully good-looking, but I didn't like her."

Penny laughed triumphantly.

"That was Retta Robinson," she replied; "her friend is Gilda Perkins. They were new last term, and rather liked the school in Sussex. But they are bored stiff with Scotland. Gilda was chuckling over Topsy's speech, but it will make life possible to go out without gowns."

The whole speech was so unlike Penny that her sister gasped.

"What nonsense," she said in her downright

way. "And, Penny darling, I wish you would stick to the girl they call Mogs. She looks so honest. The other girls are frightfully well dressed, and if they are rich it will make you more sensitive than ever about being poor."

Penny shrugged.

"I'm younger than they are, so they can't expect much," she replied. "Gilda said she was sure I'd be a good little pal, and they would try and give me a good time, but I shall stick to Mogs too. She doesn't like Gilda and Retta, but she likes me, though I'm not really a bit her sort. She adores games and collections, and boys' stunts. I don't suppose I shall see much of her if the other girls like me. So, anyhow, don't bother me, Mary Ann. You chose your set first, and I know they didn't want *me*. Now *I've* chosen *my* set, and I'm sure Retta and Gilda won't want you. They almost said so."

Mary Ann turned away, but she was feeling really sad.

Penny had had justice on her side, and it was too late to explain that she, Mary Ann, had only been lured away by boon companions because she thought Penny would be so safe with Mogs.

There was no time for explorations to-day. After lessons Miss Alys and Meriel Sallerton wanted to rope in all the girls who played games. The term promised well, since there were plenty of

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good sports ; but the leaders had two surprises. Retta and Gilda, who had seemed keen enough on tennis and cricket the term before, had no use for netball or hockey, nor could they be persuaded to join anything.

"We shall have to find our own amusements," yawned Retta ; "anyhow, netball doesn't attract us, and we loathe hockey."

"Your loss," said Alys coldly, and turned to Mogs, who did not look a particularly promising candidate. But Mogs wished to play, and stated that she could bowl. She spoke with plenty of conviction and no modesty.

"We'll give you a trial game," said Alys, "but there's only one vacancy in the hockey team, and Mary Ann Mardeen's hockey captain has written to say she's a sound player."

Mogs nodded.

"I'll like a trial game," she replied, "and I'd like to be in the team. If you don't want me, I'll concentrate on collections."

Meriel, who sat near, laughed. Alys looked disgusted. But the trial game came off, and Mogs was justified.

Miss Alys had to own they had never yet had so fine a player at the school. Meriel Sallerton was smiling like a cat which sees cream as she went up to the embryo champion.

Mogs was not the least elated. She had enjoyed

her game, her cheeks were flushed, and she actually smiled back at the head girl.

"It's a game I love," she said in answer to Meriel's congratulations, "though I've always played with boys before. I have six brothers."

"We are lucky in getting you for our team," said Meriel. "I am glad to have an enthusiast."

After that Oliver Cromwell could have made her choice of friends amongst the girls who had hung aloof before, but she did not seem anxious to become a school heroine or favourite. She would in fact have been quite content to have Pernillia only for chum, but Pernillia was wayward. She did not like games, and Retta Robinson had asked her to go for a walk with her and Gilda; they meant to find out *some* way to enliven a dull term.

And why they chose Penny Mardeen, one of the poorest and worst dressed girls in the school to make "odd man out" in their search for thrills, was best known to themselves, but seemingly Penny herself could have told, since her pretty face was crimson with excitement as she entered the room she shared with Mary Ann and Gaby.

It was Mary Ann, still half-anxious, who asked the question, and Penny who laughed in glee.

"Retta and Gilda are sports," she declared, "and, just think, Mary Ann, we met some gipsies, real gipsies, and one of them saw my charm. He was awfully excited and said I must see Mother Judith."

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I told him the charm had been given my mother by a gipsy, and that my name was Pernillia. He was thrilled, and—no ! I don't think I am going to tell you any more."

Nor could Mary Ann persuade her.

CHAPTER VI

MISSING

“WHERE,” asked Wanda aggressively, “have you been? We have been looking for you everywhere.”

Sara chuckled. She looked decidedly rumped.

“I’ve been playing with Barry,” she replied; “the girl Helen who looks after him is always reading to herself and not bothering about the kid. I don’t like her a bit. But Barry is a darling. I discovered his great pal is Mogs. Would you believe it? I feel in my bones we have made a great mistake not roping in Oliver Cromwell.”

“It’s not too late,” replied Gaby. “I mark signs of thawing in the damsel. Her first love is not very responsive, eh, Mary Ann? I thought Penny and Mogs were to become inseparable.”

“I wish they were,” sighed Mary Ann, “but it’s Penny’s fault. Retta and Gilda have their claws in her, and she won’t listen to a word I say. She just—vanishes.”

“They’re unwholesome, those two,” said Sara. “But to return to our muttons. It is Dorloch Fair

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to-morrow and a half-hol. Shall we ask Mrs. Lysden to tea in the town, or rather at M'Lean's farm, outside the town? and then we can enjoy the fun of the fair. You know, I like the widow. She's *just* as well as strict, and she won't kowtow to any one, not even Miss Alys, who was throwing her weight about yesterday concerning the dancing class. Mrs. Lysden stuck to her guns and won the day. She's a sport in a quiet way—and she keeps apart. The gobs have no use for her. Mademoiselle squashes her on every occasion. I can't think why."

"We'll take her under our wing, including Barry," decided Sara. "I'll ask her about the fair, and we'll have Alec too. After the Dane's lecture on sloppy prep work we need a cheerio."

And Mrs. Lysden accepted the eager invitation with cordial thanks. It was easy to see the new governess did *not* fit into the place assigned her.

She was just, a good teacher, sympathetic with the backward, and she interested her pupils in their work. But she was no sport, and it was soon patent to every one that she held herself as one apart from the staff and made no favourites or companions amongst the girls. A teacher—no more.

And yet there was something wistful in those big brown eyes, which seemed to ask for a friend and confidant.

"I don't know Scotland at all," she said to Sara, "and I am sure I should love the fair. No, I won't

bring Barry. There is too big a crowd, and he is like quicksilver."

She laughed as she spoke. Barry was just everything to her, and Sara understood it was so.

"We're going to ask the minister's son," she said. "He's jolly, and he's on his own. You won't mind?"

And Mrs. Lysden said she did not mind a bit.

Mrs. M'Lean was Gaby's discovery—and a splendid one too. How the girls did eat, and how they enjoyed the farmer's wife's tales of the old collie dog and the wonderful feats he had been hero of in finding stray sheep on the moors.

Sara was full of questions as to legends and mysteries, but it was Wanda who gave "shocks" to the party by asking if Mrs. M'Lean knew anything of the tenants of Stone House.

"We were warned off by an Indian with a dog," said Wanda, "but we've often longed to know if there is a mystery about the place. The Indian looked as if he'd come out of an Edgar Wallace book."

In vain did Gaby try to tread on the speaker's toe. Sara gave a quick glance at Mrs. Lysden, and saw she had gone as white as death; but she made no remark, only looking away at once.

Mrs. M'Lean shook her head.

"The Indian servant has been here to buy butter," she replied, "but I would not sell. There

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are tales going about Culloch. They say the sick gentleman practises black magic as Michael Scott did of old, and that the great dog is a werewolf which eats children. You'll not find the village bairns gathering the nuts in Stone House woods the noo."

"We *ought* to be off," said Sara briskly. "We've had a lovely tea, and we hope to come again and hear more stories, Mrs. M'Lea. You *are* good to have us."

Mrs. Lysden had regained her colour, but she was very silent, all her smiles seemed to have been driven away by the story of the wicked tenants of Stone House.

"Owl," said Gaby to Wanda in passing—and all at once Wanda remembered why!

The fair soon banished thoughts of mysteries, however. The girls threw themselves heart and soul into the fun of it all, and they soon found they were not the only pupils of Culloch House to be here.

Mademoiselle and Miss Dane each had a party, and the girls of each contingent gathered to compare notes.

The bramble drops in big glass jars were largely favoured, the peep shows thrilled them, and oh! joy of joys, *there were the gipsies!*

"We must have our fortunes told," laughed Sara. "I'll be the first."

It was no use for Mrs. Lysden to tell them it was

all nonsense. Sara declared the woman was a magician, and one after another they crowded round. It was whilst Alec was having a delicious future foretold that Pernillia and Mogs joined them.

"Retta and Gilda wouldn't come," laughed Penny, "but good old Mogs yielded to persuasion, and has got some fossils for her collection as reward. Oh, look, there's *my* gipsy over there, Mary Ann. I'm going to show him my charm."

The other girls were trying hard to persuade Mrs. Lysden to have her hand "read," so that the sisters slipped away unnoticed to where a gipsy man stood beside a grey-haired woman in gipsy dress.

Penny went up smiling, holding her "birthday gift" in her hand. Mary Ann, standing at a little distance, was startled to see the instant effect the sight of the little "hand" made. The woman rested her hands on Penny's shoulders and began talking eagerly, then, signing to the man, they led the girl away towards a tent which occupied a waste plot of ground.

Mary Ann, alarmed for her sister's safety, followed, but the gipsy man warned her back.

"Pernillia," he said, "only. She is one of us by gipsy law. You are *Giorgian*. You go back."

"I'm her sister," retorted Mary Ann indignantly. But it was no use; only Pernillia was to enter that very grubby and uninviting tent.

Mary Ann was seriously thinking of claiming help

from Mrs. Lysden when Pernillia reappeared, flushed and smiling.

She made some mysterious sign to the gipsies standing at the door of the tent, then joined her sister.

"No," she said, "I'm not going to tell you. It's a tremendous thrill. I *am* glad my name is Pernillia, and I'm going to take the greatest care of my charm. But the gipsies made me promise absolutely faithfully not to tell any one their secrets, so I shan't even tell Retta, though she is a sport—and, after all, I shall be able to join in their fun."

And she fingered a necklet of bright coloured Oriental beads the gipsies had evidently given her.

Mary Ann was horribly hurt. Penny had always confided, always relied and leaned on her, and this "breaking away" from her protection was mystifying.

Mary Ann's character was so much the stronger and more reliant. Penny, the family beauty, had been spoiled and petted, and her nature was shallow; she loved admiration, and hungered passionately for all the "good things" of life which poverty had denied her.

She rejoined Mogs, who was winning fame in coconut shying, and who scorned fortune telling.

"I saw you go off with the gipsies," added Mogs, "and you were an idiot. Yes, I know you're gipsy-named, and, of course, you are superstitious. But I



"You are Georgian. You go back."

don't trust gipsies, and I don't believe in their fortunes. They tried to get Mrs. Lysden to have hers told, and the gipsy told her a great danger threatened two lives dear to her—and that the future was obscured by a man of another race. The poor

dear believed it and nearly fainted. Here she comes with Sara and Co., who ought to have more sense."

And with great deliberation Mogs knocked over another coconut.

"Who did you come with, Mogs?" asked Mrs. Lysden, who looked as if she had a headache.

Mogs did not show the least embarrassment.

"Actually we came on our own," she said, "though we walked behind cook and Helen. They had Barry with them, and I wondered if you knew. So we followed. But we missed them when they went to have refreshments. Penny and I hadn't enough money for tea."

Mrs. Lysden looked worried.

"You had both better join our party," she said; "girls may not come to the fair without a governess, but I *know* you were thinking of Barry. I am very vexed with Helen."

"There *is* Helen," cried Sara, "but I don't see Barry. Shall I go and fetch her?"

She did not wait for permission but ran off. Mrs. Lysden and the girls waited. There was such a crowd it would have been easy to miss each other.

Helen was crying when she reached them, and Mrs. Lysden went very white when she heard Barry had wandered off and could not be found.

"What could have made you come?" she asked. "I had told you I would not allow it. You will have

to leave my service, Helen. I should never trust you again."

Helen began to cry more loudly; people were turning to look at them. Gaby and Wanda were signalling to Miss Dane's party to come and hear about the trouble.

"We'll soon find him, Mrs. Lysden," said Gaby cheerfully; "he's such a jolly little chap and such a sport. I expect he's on the swings."

"We can ask the gipsies," added Penny; but at the very mention of gipsies Mrs. Lysden's lips quivered.

"He's such a *very* little boy," she whispered, "and it is such a crowd."

A very mixed crowd, too! The rougher element was coming into it now. Miss Dane was looking quite vexed and gloomy when she came up.

"The *idea* of bringing a baby to such a place," she said, glaring at Mrs. Lysden; but Wanda struck in at once.

"We didn't bring him," she said. "Helen and cook brought him—and then lost him. We can't go home and leave him here."

Sara, who was longing to rage at Miss Dane, Helen, and all arguers, felt a touch on her arm.

There stood Mogs.

"I'm going on the chance," said Mogs in a whisper, "but I'm not telling the gov's. Will you come? There may be a row, but I don't care."

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"I'm game," replied Sara, and only regretted that Gaby was nowhere near.

Luckily they met Alec coming to meet them. He had found such a bunch of girls plus gobs too much for him, and had gone off to see a pony trial. Sara grabbed him, muttering the tale as they pushed their way through the crowd.

"Barry is lost," she explained. "Mrs. Lysden looks ill with worry. The Dane is laying down the law, and every one has a theory. Mogs has one too. Come on, Mogs. Tell us the bright idea."

"Not gipsy stealing," said Alec. "I shan't believe it if you do suggest it. This crowd of gyps don't go in for baby snatching. They prefer chickens and ducks for the pot."

"Barry," said Mogs, "will keep 'whistering' as he calls it about a black man and a de-ear doggie. Penny told me her sister said a word to Gaby in her hearing about an Indian. . . . Can you give a clue from that?"

Sara beamed.

"All the time," she retorted; "*the Stone House*. But I hadn't the remotest idea that Barry had ever been there."

She did not say they knew Barry's mother had paid the mystery man a visit!

"We'd better call and inquire," said Alec; "they can't storm at us for that. We may have no luck at all, but, as Mogs says, it is a chance."

He did not add that he had been itching to intrude into forbidden territory.

"What shall we do?" asked Sara. "Walk up the drive and ring at the front door, or climb the wall and scout?"

The vote was in favour of the first suggestion.

After all, it was better to be open about the call. It was not as if they *knew* Barry to be at the Stone House, either as free agent or kidnapped kiddie. They simply made their inquiries.

"The only hitch," said Mogs, "is, are we going to believe it if they say he is not there?"

"We'll have to leave it to his mother, then," replied Sara; "but we can do this for her. And we *may* learn all about the mystery."

Alec's lips twitched. He would not have suggested to his chums that they were rather enjoying this adventure of mixed motives, instead of giving themselves to the task of searching for the missing child in the crowded fair.

CHAPTER VII

THE RETURN OF BARRY

“**I** EXPECT,” said Mogs, “we shall have to climb the wall. The gates are sure to be locked.”

Sara shook her head.

“If the Indian has taken the boy on a visit to his master,” she replied, “the little gate will be open. It would be a wash-out to climb the wall again. I mean the mystery man would have something to grouse about; and you know what Mustog Ali said about the dog.”

Alec walked a few steps ahead of the others. This was his first visit, and he was as eager as the girls.

They met no one on the way up the carriage drive, which was in a state of great neglect.

“Sh—shall we ring the bell?” asked Sara, who had been looking anxiously round for any sign of the great hound.

But Alec answered by pointing to where the door was already opening and the tall figure of the Indian emerged. The dog was not with him, but he came hurrying towards the intruders, his face showing his indignation.

Alec went to meet him.

"We are only calling," he said, "to ask if a little boy has been here. A boy of four. He was missing from the fair."

The Indian frowned.

"No child. Master sick. The place is most private, sahib," he replied. "The Missie-Baba knows this. My master will be very angry. It is a very great insolence to intrude."

Sara flushed as she too stepped to Alec's side.

"The child we seek *has* been here," she said; "that is his woolly rabbit, see, under the bush." And she sprang forward.

Mustog Ali took a silver whistle from the folds of his robe and blew a single blast. Sara looked round.

Mogs had disappeared.

There was a rush, a deep-throated bark, and Sultan came bounding round the corner of the house. He looked a formidable foe, and Alec pushed Sara behind him as he dropped to one knee.

Sultan showed no inclination to respond to a gallant appeal for friendship, and Sara was clenching her hands, fearing catastrophe, when another whistle was heard and the great dog paused, one paw raised, his golden eyes still gleaming with resentment; but some one called his name, and into view came a little group which made Sara gasp.

A tall, slender man with pale face and deep-set

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eyes came slowly along, holding Barry by one hand whilst Mogs clutched the other.

How Mogs had managed to locate the boy puzzled the two, who had half believed her to have fled in panic at sight of Mustog Ali.

The Indian seemed as startled as the intruders at sight of the three who advanced, and Sara noticed the dismay on the native's face as he bowed respectfully and caught Sultan by the collar.

The new-comer—evidently the mysterious Mr. Felix Brown himself—paused to look at Alec and Sara.

Then he turned to Mogs, beckoning her to join her friends with the child.

"I can only say," he said slowly, and evidently choosing his words with great care, "you have caused me both inconvenience and trouble which may result in very serious illness.

"I—am here for my health. My Indian servant takes care of me. It is *necessary* that I see no one. This child's mother knows me, and she called. I have told her my wishes. She will not call again. The child," he hesitated, "the child," he went on, "is the son of one I loved. I wished to see him . . . but his mother refused. My servant, angry at her cruelty, brought the little one to me. He would have taken him later to Culloch House. As it is, you shall take him and give to his mother this message. *I know what to do now if the visit is*



Mustog Ali took a silver whistle from the folds of his robe.

repeated. Will you remember? I understand you are schoolgirls at Culloch House. You will not intrude again, or . . .”.

He looked at Alec. The boy returned the look fearlessly.

“I am Alec Fannock,” he said, “the minister’s son.”

The other nodded.

"I include you *and* your father," he said. "I see no one, but, to-day you make it necessary. I shall have to leave if I am troubled again. It is—a matter of my life. I warn you my servant loves me—and he is a Sikh. I warn you that he may act in a way I should deplore.

"You take your lives in your hands if you come again. Not that *I* would hurt you, but in his devotion he would not spare you. You all understand?"

Mogs stooped and lifted Barry in her arms. He seemed sleepy and took no further notice of Mustog Ali or his new acquaintance.

"You all understand?" repeated Felix Brown impatiently.

"No," said Alec, "we don't understand, sir, but, of course, we will obey."

"Of course," agreed Sara, but Mogs was cuddling Barry and did not reply.

Without a word further Mr. Brown turned away. He seemed tired, and his eyes had a queer look which set Sara puzzling. She was wondering if Mr. Felix Brown were really as ill as he said, or if he had other reasons for hiding away in Scotland. But with Mustog Ali shepherding them, and with Sultan by his side, they did not feel inclined to speak till they were outside the gates.

Then Sara assumed authority.

"Mogs," she urged, "*could* you and Alec take Barry home, and I'll run back to the fair and tell them? I'll—er—just say Barry had gone wandering off into the woods. I think Mrs. Lysden would rather have the message when she is alone."

Mogs nodded.

"We'll take him," she agreed. "He was ever so pleased to see me, though, Mr.—er—is it Brown? had him on his knee, giving him cakes and showing him a book."

"Barry saw me and came scampering as fast as he could. I don't think I ever saw any one look more disgusted than the mystery man. But—it's a queer start. Mrs. Lysden *must* know him fairly well, and yet he made it plain he never wanted to see her again. He need not have said so much about the Indian. I preferred the man to the master."

"Same here," agreed Alec. "The master had a sly look in his eyes. I guess he knows a thing or two. He looked clever in a big way. I *am* glad I saw him. There's a fascination about the business. I don't think we've got very far in the mystery yet. I wonder what's at the bottom of it all."

"*Mud*," said Mogs, "there generally is! Come along, Alec. If Barry gets too heavy you can carry him. I wonder if *he* will be giving anything away."

"Not likely," laughed Alec. "He would only have noticed the cakes and the dog. Oh! *and* the Indian; but I don't fancy he was taken up with him."

Now we ought to be off. Do run, Sara—for Mrs. Lysden will be breaking her heart.”

And Sara found that true enough.

The searchers had all gathered together in a big cluster near the stalls. Mrs. Lysden looked terribly ill and worn. Miss Dane was storming at an indignant gipsy and a circus manager who was becoming threatening.

Sara hurled herself into the pending fray with the good news.

“Barry’s gone home,” she sang. “Mogs and Alec have taken him. He had gone off to the woods, and was sleepy. He hasn’t told us the tale of his adventures. Mogs took him at once and I ran on here.”

It was not surprising that Mrs. Lysden burst into tears of relief, leaving it to Miss Dane to apologize to wrongly accused people and thank the many searchers.

“No more fairs for me,” concluded the irate lady as she gathered the various flocks together with the help of Mademoiselle and the elder girls. “These Scottish peasants with their hoots and havers are bad enough, but when it comes to *gipsies*. . .” And the poor lady, finding words fail her, simply glared.

Mrs. Lysden seemed to know by instinct that Sara had more to tell, but she waited to hear till the girls came to her in the day nursery.

Barry was in bed, Helen dismissed, and Mrs.

Lysden, worn out and sad-eyed, came to her waiting pupils.

"My *dears*," she said so pathetically that they nearly cried.

Sara began the story, and Mogs ended it. The message was repeated over twice, and Mrs. Lysden shivered as she listened; she even forgot the girls' presence.

"I don't know *what* to do," she whispered. "I don't know *what* to do. It is too difficult, too cruel."

Suddenly she put her head down on the table and began to sob in such a heartbroken way that Sara could not stand it. Kneeling down, she put her arm round her governess's waist.

"Can't *we* do something?" she pleaded; "you can trust us absolutely. We'd no idea when we blundered into this that you were up against anything serious. Do let us help."

Mrs. Lysden bent to kiss the eager face, then held out her hand to Mogs.

"You are my friends, girls," she said. "I shall never be able to look on you as anything else now. You don't *know* what a comfort you are to me in this school, where I meet with such coldness and even distrust. I—I can't tell you my story, dears, but I will tell you this. I came here as Junior English Governess, and Literature Mistress, with a very different reason from the one that is apparent. I *am* poor. I *need* the money I earn, but I came to

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Culloch because I knew who lived at the Stone House. He is the only person who can help me to right a great wrong and find my lost happiness. But he refuses. Just at this moment everything looks black, hopeless. Yet I believe in two things—the love and justice of God. I believe in human agents too, and I thank you with all my heart for an offer of help I may need one day to take. In the meantime, would you promise not to tell, even your comrades who have already been to the Stone House, of this second visit? I myself will see Mr. Fannock.”

“We promise,” said Sara and Mogs.

Of course they were sorry. Gaby and the others would wonder at their silence. Sara specially felt that Gaby would have reason for her reproaches. But it could not be helped.

“They’ll *have* to trust me,” she told Mogs, “and you, of course, must come right into our councils. We want *fun*, though just at the moment we don’t seem to have struck lucky.”

Mogs nodded.

“If we can cheer up Mrs. Lysden and make things jolly for the kid,” she retorted, “it will be better than fun.”

And Sara agreed.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT OF PERNILLIA ?

“**L**OOK here,” said Wanda, firmly, as she faced the ring of comrades, “if we don’t take care we shall be a camp divided against itself. There is an air of secrecy about some of you which doesn’t tend to comradeship. There’s the arraignment. Come along and let’s put our cards on the table. Mogs and Sara, you are at the bar.”

Sara laughed. She knew all about Wanda’s “bark.”

“Honour amongst thieves,” she retorted. “You’ve got to respect any one else’s secret, chums. Mogs and I promised not to tell a secret we tumbled on. Alec Fannock has a slice of it, but that is all. One day we may get leave to tell. You ought to know me well enough to realize I should have told my pals if it had been possible.”

“All right, Sara,” sang Gaby, “it’s topping of you to have told us, and we *do* understand. No questions asked, but if we can lend a hand just trot it out.”

“Next,” said Wanda, “latest recruit. Mary Ann. What’s wrong with you, old bean ? You look

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as glum as I do when I fail to chase a rabbit to its burrow. Have you a secret—or not ? ”

Mary Ann stood up, her hands clasped behind her back, her freckled face unusually grave.

“ *I am* glum,” she said, “ and it’s awfully decent of you folk to want to help me ; at least, I am sure you *would* help me if you could, and you are the only people I could ask without feeling a sneak ! You see it is Pernillia.”

“ *I know*,” nodded Gaby. “ Gipsies.”

“ No,” said Mary Ann, “ it’s not gipsies. *I don’t* see how gipsies can hurt her. They wouldn’t be likely to steal her, and they are—or were—under an obligation to our parents. No, what is worrying me is because she won’t tell me what Retta and Gilda are after. She let out something about the Castle, and that Peter and Paul were topping sports, but when I asked her to tell me she only giggled and said she wasn’t in any dry-as-dust ‘ set,’ which was only fit for juniors. Of course Retta and Gilda look at me as if I were mad. Penny said they told her they could not believe we were sisters. It’s awfully worrying, for I am absolutely sure those two are the worst possible friends for Penny. I don’t want to sound priggish or superior, but Penny is so easily coaxed and flattered. I expect *I* should be if I were pretty. So that’s that, and I don’t know what to do.”

“ We might tell Miss Alys,” said Gaby thoughtfully, “ but it wouldn’t be quite cricket, as we don’t

actually know anything. But I have wondered myself as to why the swanky Retta and Gilda should take up Penny."

"She isn't a bit in their set really," urged Mary Ann; "they are rich and fashionable, and grown-up. Penny has always been so young for her age, and rather helpless."

"We'll try and get hold of her," said Sara; "she's riding for a fall. What about it, Mogs? Penny hung round your neck at first."

"I was a stepping-stone," replied Mogs slowly; "she had no one else. We didn't match a bit, but I'm fond of her. She is just what Mary Ann says, *helpless*. When I see her trotting off to give and talk secrets to those two, I always think of a spider and a fly—or *two* spiders!—and long to smash the web. I expect we shall. I have an idea Meriel and Miss Alys are watching Gilda and Retta—they don't improve the school."

"Of course they don't," blurted out Wanda, "and if you called a spade a spade as I do you'd say they were rotten. They are just using Penny because she's pretty and simple. They'll make a catspaw of her to pull their chestnuts out of the fire, and leave her in the lurch. But we'll find a way of getting her back. Don't fuss, Mary Ann, and let's come back to starting-point. I want some fun. We've *never* had such topping surroundings.* Glens, ruins, a decent lad like Alec for chum—and yet we

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are going off in twos and threes talking of other people's business. Let's think of our own for a bit."

It sounded grumpy, but then it was only Wanda, and so they roared.

"We'll ask Alec," decided Sara. "It's half-holiday to-morrow, and we'll ask Topsy if, in view of our good behaviour, we may take our tea out. We can buy our own cakes at Mrs. M'Lean's, and we could start early."

"Pat on the back for Captain Sara," said Gaby; "but I'll tell you one better if you promise, honour, not to think I am swanking. It was—er—my birthday yesterday, and my godfather, who is a dear, has sent me a pound to buy—as he says—a birthday cake. So what do you think I mean to do? Invite you all to tea at the farm! Alec too, and we'll get the very latest tales and suggestions from Mrs. M'Lean. Are you game?"

"Cheers," sang Sara. "United we stand. Good old Gaby! I love that farm, and Mrs. M'Lean is one of those rare souls who don't bustle. We shall all be there, Gaby, and it is possible I may have a birthday party later. You see, my pukka birthday is in the hols, so I am done out of the joy of a school birthday—a really superior thing, since *every* day is a birthday in the hols. Now, a little cheerful singing, and we can go our ways with the clouds all pushed away."

It was a great resolution, and, though Mary Ann wondered if those comrades would ever really be able to help, she decided to keep smiling and hope Gilda and Retta would soon tire of having Penny for a "run-about" fag.

"Penny's too proud," she decided, "to play Cinderella amongst all their grand friends, and she can't *possibly* be grand herself."

It was still warm enough at the end of September for girls to indulge in rambles, though Mrs. Hinford told the petitioners that on no account were they to picnic. She was quite ready, however, to sanction a farmhouse tea.

"Topsy is a sport," said Gaby, when she brought the news, "and on the strength of it I have gone in for the literature prize. Not that I have an earthly chance against such shining lights as Merion. But I might get honourable mention."

Her chums laughed. Gaby was clever, really clever, though she never mentioned any achievement; but one day—in far-off dreams—she saw herself an authoress of distinction, and so, without talking of ambitions, she did her best to put foundations under her dreams by research.

Legends of all kinds fascinated her, and it was still a family joke to tell of Gaby, during one summer's holiday five years previously, trotting off all on her own to a certain cave and remaining there alone all night in the hope of seeing a mermaid !

Mrs. M'Lean had been quite ready to prepare that birthday party. She liked the "little leddies" from the Old House, and she had a tea fit for queens, as Sara declared, when the girls trooped into the big cosy kitchen.

Alec was getting quite "used" to his new friends, and what a difference it made to explore in company.

The business of feasting came first, and nobody troubled about evening shadows as they drew Megsie M'Lean into their circle and asked for her advice as to where to go to find a *real* thrill.

"We don't mind what it is," said Gaby, "but the more extraordinary the better. I suppose you have no werewolves or hidden treasures in the neighbourhood?"

Mrs. M'Lean chuckled.

"Hoots-toots," she scolded. "What do ye lasses want wi' sic things?"

"We'd *love* the hidden treasure," replied Sara, "but for a change I wouldn't mind locating an air-smuggler. We've not seen many aeroplanes about, but at home I often hear about air-smugglers. It would be real fun to catch one."

"I've nae use for they airships," retorted Mrs. M'Lean. "Ye nivver know when ye get in hoo ye'll be thrown out. There was a man kilt near Loch Culloch last spring—a braw laddie too."

"We must go to the loch one day; good idea,"

said Wanda. "A moonlight picnic in boats would be fun, and Alec could fish."

Alec grimaced. He knew exactly how much *fishing* he was likely to get with a bunch of magpies in tow.

"Ye'll not have been as far as Jacobites' Glen," said Mrs. M'Lean ; "that's a fine place wi' a history. I'll tell ye the tale if ye wad have it."

Have it ! Of course they would, and drew close, Alec smiling as one who knows, and half sorry not to be the story-teller himself.

"There was sair trouble in Culloch and a' the neeborhood," said Mrs. M'Lean, "in the '45 when Geordie's men came chasing our puir laddies. And cruel were the hearts o' the sodgers in huntin' doon those who fought for love and not for siller.

"And in a' Scotland were nae mair loyal hearts beatin' for the white cockade than those o' Jennie Graeme and Hamish M'Farlane. •

"Jennie had nae mair than seventeen summers, but Hamish was ten years her elder. Aye, but they lo'ed each other, and only one the better—and that was the bonnie Prince. •

"There was fectoring roun' Culloch House at t' time, and searchin' for our laddies.

"Ane o' Charlie's men was Sir Alan Fraser, an' he was comin' to the help of the Grahams at Culloch House. . . . They cam' secretly up through the valley, an' their way might weel lead through the glen I'm tellin' ye aboot.

“And in that glen lay Hamish M'Farlane, bound an' helpless, a prisoner to Geordie's sodgers. And it was as Jennie creepit to his rescue that they caught her.

“They knew that nae more loyal folk wore the white cockade than the Graemes o' Culloch Farm, and they taud Jennie if she stood on t' great rock half-way up t' glen and ca'ed to Fraser's men to come along that gait to Culloch House, they'd spare her and her laddie and set nae fire to t' farm.

“And Jennie, standin' there in her plaidie, wi' thoughts of her laddie lying there before her two e'en, all trussed for t' killing, taud them she wad stand on t' rock to greet Fraser's men.

“T' story tells how Hamish, hearing the tale o' his sweetheart's treachery, groaned in agony worse than death, but Geordie's sodgers laughed as they planned their ambush and set Jacobite Jennie there on t' rock.

“Then along came Fraser's men, wi' claymores an' dirks an' love o' the bonnie Prince, ready to fight to the last, and vowing to save Culloch House.

“And as t' moonlight fell on t' figure o' Jennie Graeme they stood up ready to follow her lead as they thought.

“But Jennie was no traitress, an' she cried, shrill an' loud, biddin' them gae back by anither road sin' Geordie's men waited in t' glen.

“And wi' the words on her bonnie lips she fell,



"I don't see why people should be afraid of a ghost."

struck down by cowards, who had nae thought for a true lass.

"Sae they killed Jacobite Jennie and her braw lover Hamish M'Farlane, who I ken was glad to be sae soon on t' road after his bit lassie.

"But Fraser's men, seein' t' murder^o of a lass who gave her life for them, rushed up t' glen, and

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struck sae true and fiercely that they killed twice their number that day, and won through to Culloch Hoose, whaur they raised t' siege an' sent Geordie's men scampering.

"They buried Jacobite Jennie and her laddie wi' sair greetin's an' the skirl o' the pibroch sounding through t' glen, and they say if ye gang through t' glen when t' moon be shining ye'll see Jacobite Jennie standing on t' rock, waitin' to gie t' word to save t' lads o' the white cockade."

"O-oh!" gasped Sara, thrilling with enthusiasm. "What a *darling*. But I'd love to see her. I don't see why people should be afraid of a nice ghost like that."

Mrs. M'Lean shook her head.

"I've nae mair on ma conscience than ither folk, lassie," she replied, "but I'd nae care to set ma e'en on such speerits as ought to be restin' peaceful after sae long, and tak' no tent o' the wark they did for weal or woe when they had bodies to live in."

And the girls were too discreet to laugh.

But there was no one to hang back when Gaby, mistress to-day of the ceremonies, whispered that with twilight creeping down over the moors they could not have a better moment in which to see Jacobite Jennie.

"We'll stay till we do, eh?" she added. "After ~~that~~ *tea* no one could have nerves."

Sara winked at Alec.

"We are prepared," she retorted. "Of *course* we are. Ghosts or any old stunt, you've only to say the word."

"Wait and see," replied Wanda. "We could *not* return from a birthday party without an adventure. Gaby, you, and Alec ought to lead the way. I'll see to it there are no waverers at the back."

Mogs snorted.

"It'll be the ghosts of Fraser's men storming through the glen," she replied, "though I believe I'd rather have something more substantial. What about Mustog Ali ?".

Mary Ann shivered.

"I *am* afraid of him," she confessed, little dreaming that even at that moment Mustog Ali himself stood watching the little party with dark eyes filled with suspicion.

CHAPTER IX

GHOSTS OF THE GLEN

“**H**USH,” urged Gaby. “You see up there, with the mountain ash tree near; there’s the rock, isn’t it, Alec?”

“Yes,” said Alec, “I never thought of it before, but this glen is topping. I’ve often hunted about for caves in it. Some of the old villagers declare that there *are* wonderful caves, but no one has ever had the clue given.

“There’s the little one near the rock which some people call M’Farlane’s Cave, but it’s really only like a hole hollowed out of the rocky cliff. I must put my thinking cap on and take you to some of the most romantic places. There’s the Witch’s Stone where all witches gather on Hallowe’en and renew their oaths to the devil. That’s quite jolly, and there’s a great tree close to the Stone called Peeping Tam’s Hanging Tree. He was a man who went to spy on the witches, but they chased him, and he got caught by his hair or neck in the branches of the tree and was hanged.”

“Topping,” said Wanda, but Mary Ann only laughed.

"Let's look for fairies, and crocks of gold, and lovely ladies, or wishing wells," said she. "You seem to *like* horrors."

"Hist!" urged Gaby. "Do you know I thought I saw a man's shadow thrown by the moonlight against that rock. Do keep very still—and watch."

"We ought to make an ambush or a scouting party," said Alec; "there's no sport in bunching up together like this. Spread yourselves out. Gaby, go and squat under that bank. Sara, you see that rock—cut along! Mogs, you can lie in that long grass, you've the best idea of the game. Mary Ann can stay with me."

It was more exciting, but rather nerve-racking.

The glen was flooded now by moonlight, which ought to have reminded the girls that it was high time to be back at school. But they never gave it a thought. So much for concentration on your task!

Mary Ann not only concentrated, but would have cried out in horror had not Alec's hand pressed warningly on her mouth.

The girls, each in her separate hiding-place, watched the huge grey rock half-way up the glen in speechless amaze.

Shadows of men flitted in silhouette past it. A woman stood motionless in the light, and it was she who gave the key to the riddle.

"*Gipsies*," whispered Sara to herself. She saw

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the wisdom of Scout Alec now in keeping them apart. You can't confide audibly to yourself with any sort of satisfaction.

The slender figure of the gipsy, a younger woman than Mother Judith, slipped away into the shadows as a man came creeping from some hidden place holding a girl by the hand. The girl walked upright, but with uncertain gait owing to the heavy bandage about her eyes.

Mary Ann clung closer to Alec.

It was Pernillia !

Alec put his arm round his companion, placing his lips against her ear.

"You *must* be silent," he commanded ; " don't speak . . . don't whisper. *We* are in danger, *she* is not."

The gipsy girl was waiting for the man and younger girl. Together they led Pernillia down through the valley, whilst the men who had already come out into the open remained gathered near the rock. In the clear moonlight it made quite a romantic picture.

The glen itself with its clustering trees and rocks, its tall foxgloves and crimson rowan-berries ; the blindfolded girl in her shabby frock, her red-gold curls agleam over the bandage ; the picturesque grouping of gipsies.

But to Mary Ann at least there was tragedy in the sight of her sister in such company.

What *were* those gipsy villains doing to her Penny ?

Yet Alec's restraining arm held mute warning, and before her fear could culminate in that "bottled shriek" the terror had passed.

The gipsy had unloosed the white-and-gold scarf and was bowing gracefully to the girl, who was evidently far more pleased than frightened.

They could see how she carried herself, apeing a queenly dignity ! They could smile now at the way she hurried off down the glen, with a gipsy girl and boy as protectors, not jailers. The others watched her go, then went back up the glen.

Pernillia was out of sight . . . and the watchers fully expected to see the elder gipsies vanish back into what they supposed must be M'Farlane's Cave.

But instead they climbed to the top of the glen, and so apparently away over the moors. Alec rose to his feet, and at the signal the girls flocked round. Mogs hung back the farthest, and seemed more interested in the way Penny had gone than in facing Jacobite Jennie's rock.

"Let's go up to 'the rock,'" urged Alec in eager tones. "I'd like to have a squint at M'Farlane's Cave. As far as I remember it's a bare little place. I can't *quite* see why they wanted to bandage the girl's eyes."

"*My sister*," added Mary Ann. "It was Pernillia.

D—do you think the gipsies had been taking her to their secret haunts ? ”

“ Never to Gipsy-town,” gasped Sara, “ I *don’t* think.”

“ Then I do,” was Alec’s unexpected reply. “ Exactly what I *do* think. They must think a terrific lot of—er—Per—Per . . . ”

“ Nillia,” added Mary Ann.

“ Pernillia. Or they would never be treating a *Giorgian* schoolgirl as they did. It’s this charm, I suppose. I’ve *heard* of such things but never seen one. They may have taken her to see some one, but they took jolly good care she should not know the secret. Anyhow, *I’m* going to look.”

They reached the great rock where a Jacobite lass had given her life for love of Prince Charlie, and they found the cave, hidden by creepers, close by. It was certainly a dull little recess in appearance, but it held its secret—the secret of many generations. . . .

It was Sara who found the long, thin ridge of metal wedged between the rocks ; and it was she who, drawing it out, set the machinery working.

There, almost at their feet, lay the wide stair which no doubt led down to Gipsy-town.

“ The secret,” whispered Alec, “ of the Borders. In dad’s old books it is spoken of again and again. And it is death to the *Giorgian* who learns it.”

“ The girls crowded together.

Mogs looked back with a shudder towards the



"It was Sara who found the ridge of metal."

moonlit valley. She was a queer girl in many ways, and her brothers had cured her of speaking in haste or playing the alarmist.

Before she said one word she wanted to *make sure* she had seen Mustog Ali's sleuth-like figure gliding amongst the trees.

She saw no sign of him now, and so said nothing.

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Alec was kneeling on the top step of the dark stairway.

He could hear, very faintly, the far-distant strumming of strings, the echo of a song he could not recognize.

There were men and women in that underground sanctuary who would be ready to safeguard their secret by the only sure method.

"We must go down," pleaded Sara. "Penny must have gone, so I don't see why we should not."

Alec shook his head.

"I don't see why you should *wish* to die," he retorted. "If this is the entrance to Gipsy-town, girls, it is as much as our lives are worth to let any one know it. As to going down, it would be suicide. We'd just better close *sesame* up and skedaddle before our friends the Smiths and Shosmiths, Lees and Allens return home."

He spoke so forcefully that no one attempted to argue. Of course they were regretful. It seemed such a tame ending to adventure when the way had opened for thrilling discoveries.

But Alec did not speak a second time, and as the stone gritted and scraped as it fitted into place, Wanda's voice was heard urging greater speed in flight.

"I believe the gipsies are coming back," she said. "Yes! Look, there is one, and the others will follow. What shall we do?"

"*Not* go back down the glen," said Alec firmly. "They would be after us in one tick. Follow me. Never mind a few scratches. We'll be in Queer Street if they spot us."

They slipped round to the rock, which hid them completely from view as they forced their way through a tangle of brambles.

Talk of a few scratches indeed! Legs and arms suffered badly, and Mogs had a scratch across her cheek.

But they were outside the thicket, rolling down pell-mell into a ditch, scaring sleepy rabbits and then scrambling up again on to the moors beyond. No breathing time either.

Those gipsies had eyes and ears of a lynx, and once they were seen they would be pursued.

At the crossroads they parted from Alec in spite of his anxiety to see them home.

"It's all right," said Gaby, who was taking command again. "We've had a jolly birthday party, eh? Bye-bye, and don't go exploring without us. Promise?"

"Promise," laughed Alec, little dreaming how difficult he was going to find it to keep a promise so lightly made.

It was nearly nine o'clock when they reached Culloch House, and a prim maid told them Mrs. Hinford wished to see them at once.

Of course they were guilty, and at sight of their

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mistress's pale face and strained expression, repentance came quickly.

Gaby, as party leader, tried to take the blame, but Sara pleaded for time to give a full explanation.

I am afraid it was not *altogether* the fullest that could have been given. Had it been so, how much sorrow and suffering would have been saved.

Sara told of Jacobite Jennie and of the gathering of the gipsies in the glen, but she omitted two details: the appearance of Pernillia and the finding of the staircase which Alec claimed to be the entrance of Gipsy-town.

Mrs. Hinford could have smiled at some parts of the story, but she was infinitely relieved. After all, it was a childish escapade with no harm except the one of forgetfulness of time and a promise to be home by seven o'clock.

"There must be no more expeditions," was her verdict, "and for the present I must forbid you to go out with Alec Fannock. There are plenty of games and organized excursions for you girls, and in future you must be content with those."

It was a bitter blow, with only one redeeming feature which Gaby was quick to note as the girls gathered together.

"Topsy never asked us to promise," she chuckled, "and so—well, no more excursions for the present. But don't forget, girls, if we want an adventure there is always the secret passage."

CHAPTER X

AN INVITATION

"I AM sure," said Mary Ann, confronting Pernillia with accusation in her eyes, "you are doing something which isn't straight. What are you hiding under those boxes? I am *sure* you were hiding something, Penny, and you may just as well tell me."

Penny's pretty face grew crimson with anger.

"How *dare* you speak so to me," she stormed. "Gilda and Retta say they can't think why I have ever been idiot enough to stand it. But you won't get me kowtowing to you any more. You can keep to your silly softies of friends who play the goat as if they were kids in pinafores. I am fifteen and a half, and Retta says——"

"I don't care a straw what Retta says," retorted Mary Ann. "I want to know where you are getting your money from, and what games you are up to? If you don't play square, Penny, I'll go to Topsy."

The girls were standing in one of the unused attics of the school. A place of dust, cobwebs, and debris of all kinds. An attic for youthful explora-

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tions and discoveries. Not in the least the sort of place Mary Ann had expected to corner Penny in.

But here she was, and unless Mary Ann were mistaken it was a cardboard dress-box which her sister was hiding away under that piece of old carpet.

Never had the sisters been "up against it" in this way.

Mary Ann had come to school eager to be friend, champion, and adviser of the gentler senior; and she could hardly realize yet that Penny was completely beyond control. Penny was just as much under influence, just as weak and easily led as before. But she had chosen the wrong teachers!

"Sneak!" she flared now. "Only I know you wouldn't dare. Your set is well known for doing ridic things and breaking rules. The only person to back you up is the widow. But I heard on good authority that Mts. Hinford isn't keeping her, and a good thing too! Even Miss Dane doesn't trust her, and Miss Alys thinks she has a secret and a past. We don't keep our ears closed, and we know. I only wish she would be cleared out at half-term."

"You little cat," blazed Mary Ann. "Mrs. Lysden is the jolliest, cleverest governess here, and she sized your rotten set-up in two ticks. Now I'm going to look inside that dress-box."

"You're not!"

"I shall. If you're not hiding something wrong you wouldn't mind."

"It's *not* wrong," cried Penny angrily; "it's not your business, that's my only reason. I will *not* be dictated to and spied on. I shall write home . . ."

"Do," said Mary Ann, and made her dash. Penny sprawled, but she was too late; and, quick as thought, her sister had the cardboard box out—and open.

Folds of tissue paper hid the contents for a moment—and Penny screamed in dismay.

"Your dirty hands! Oh, you'll spoil it. You little wretch."

Mary Ann hesitated, but she was determined as well as perplexed, whilst a cry of very real surprise broke from her lips as she lifted out from its bed of soft paper the daintiest of pale green *crêpe de Chine* frocks.

"Penny!" she gasped. "Why, it's not *yours*. Where did it come from? Who . . ."

Penny burst into tears.

"It's not your business. I won't have you interfere," she stormed. "I won't tell you. I won't."

"You'll have to," replied Mary Ann, "or I take it straight to Mrs. Hinford."

"What is the row?" drawled a voice in the doorway, and there stood Retta.

Mary Ann was not the least dismayed.

"It's not a row," she said, "and it is no business of yours. I was only asking Penny where she got this dress."

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Retta laughed. She was a handsome girl, with a very high opinion of herself ; in fact, her pride was a matter of amusement to both governesses and girls, though Miss Alys thoroughly disliked both Retta and Gilda.

"No business of mine, you little frump ?" she drawled. "It is very much my business since it is my dress. Hand it over, Penny. What on earth did you bring it up here for ? I shan't be wearing it at the dancing lessons—or at the Christmas dance."

Penny hesitated, flushed and wet-eyed, but she handed it to her friend after a short pause, giggling as she did so.

"One for you, Mary Ann," she said.

"Not at all," replied Mary Ann. "If you had told me it was Retta's I should have said nothing more ; but I don't believe it is. And I want to know where the money came from ?"

Retta laughed.

"Same quarter as the rest of her money comes from, I suppose," she mocked ; "it's a pity you didn't smile on the rich relation. Your clothes are a disgrace to the school. Come with me, Penny dear, and we'll try on the frock."

"*And mind your own business,*" added Penny, looking over her shoulder at her sister.

Mary Ann stood, arms akimbo and dust-smear'd.

"Anyhow, you need not have told lies about it," she called after the two ; but when they had gone she



"Mind your own business," added Penny.

just curled herself up on the ragged piece of carpet and howled.

Penny, her own sister, was turning her down for girls who were having a bad influence on her. Penny was doing things in secret, visiting gipsies and no one knew what else, and Mary Ann with her protective love felt *she* was responsible.

It seemed that the passionate prayer whispered in that attic would be bearing fruit, for that very evening Miss Alys came into where the girls were at prep for next day.

The tinkling of Miss Dane's little bell sounded joyfully in the ears of the lazy ones fully ten minutes before seven o'clock.

"News," murmured Gaby to Sara, "and good news. It looks like an extra holiday—and no wonder seeing what patterns . . ."

"I have had a very kind invitation for you girls," said Miss Alys in her briskest tones. "Mrs. Mingleton has written to ask you all over for a long afternoon at the Castle. She hopes we can arrange it for tomorrow whilst this spell of fine weather lasts. We shall start at two-thirty, leaving you time to change your dresses after dinner."

How they cheered. An extra holiday with a treat attached. As soon as Miss Alys had finished her speech the girls rushed to dearest friends to plan a programme for the great day. The elder girls gathered round Miss Alys to ask what they were likely to be doing.

"No idea," she laughed. "Of course the grounds are gorgeous. You won't be allowed to have a dull minute."

And that was good enough—or ought to have been.

Lessons next morning were not too successful.

Mademoiselle scolded, Miss Dane looked grim, and Mrs. Lysden *very* nearly decided that Retta and Gilda ought to remain behind.

Those two were quite as excited but not altogether as joyous as the others.

"Crumpled rose-leaf somewhere," Sara said to Gaby. "I wonder now what it is. Those girls are playing their own little game, and they've got Penny Mardeen body and soul. Look at her now being made a little fool of by them. I'm sorry for Mary Ann, who is a good sort."

But pity was not helping Mary Ann, who had actually started some half-dozen times to write home about the matter, and then torn the letter up.

"Mum *would* be so worried," thought Mary Ann, "and dad would tell me to use my influence. And I haven't got any."

Sara and her chums had a thrill as soon as they reached the Castle, for there was Alec.

"The edict has been revoked," Sara told him gaily; "we may invite you to our adventures, and I have a lovely idea brewing in my head. I've written to my married sister about it, and she may rise to the occasion. If she does we'll come to the manse and tell you."

Mrs. Mingleton was big, deep-voiced, and kindly.

"I don't know much about girls," she told Miss Alys, "I only have boys. Here they are. They had meant to desert me but thought better of it, the

rascals. A very nice lot of girls, Miss Hinford. I like that little red-haired girl ; she dances . . .”

“Hallo, mother,” sang one of the sons, interrupting his mother’s chatter, “what’s the idea ? Games or tea ?”

And Miss Alys saw him give a decidedly warning wink. Peter and Paul were very young men with a very good opinion of themselves, which was justified by their handsome appearance and the prospect of great riches.

Sara and her friends disliked them at sight.

“Swank,” said Gaby ; “perfect manners, perfect clothes, and perfectly swollen heads. How I’d like to take them down a peg or two.”

But the majority of the girls cast admiring and reverential eyes on the young heroes who patronized them.

Sara’s sharp eyes saw most though. She noted how the twins greeted Retta and Gilda, pulling Penny’s red locks with friendly jest, whilst Paul went off with the three presently to show them the horses.

That was Mrs. Mingleton’s great idea, to show all the splendour of her domain. Of course the girls enjoyed it. They scrambled up to the tower, looked noisily for ghosts in the gallery, and finally trooped off to see the model farm.

They saw the cows milked, watched the eggs being collected, and were enthusing over the pigeons

which came circling round at Peter's call when disaster overtook the party.

One of the girls—her name never transpired—had gone on the prowl by herself, and, having opened a shed door and seeing an animal pawing and pacing about impatiently within, fled, leaving the door open.

Thus Paul, coming back from showing Retta and Gilda some prize bantams, gave an exclamation of anger and concern at sight of a chestnut-coloured colt pushing its way boldly into the yard.

Rejoicing in unexpected freedom the colt kicked out gaily, sending a solemn goose sprawling into the muck heap with outspread wings. Cries of alarm rose from the crowd of girls, some of whom had come reluctantly to the farm. Paul, with lordly stride, ran to the rescue with a view to driving that wicked-eyed colt back to its prison shed. But that colt had no idea of so speedily losing his freedom, and so violently resented Paul's stern tones and waving arms that it made a rush, sent him backwards almost atop Mother Goose on the muck heap, and would have charged the screaming flock of intruders but for Sara and Mogs who, with great presence of mind and knowledge of horses, succeeded in grabbing the trailing rope which the escaped prisoner had failed to be rid of, and with plucky coaxing and authority managed to get the colt back into its shed before more mischief could be laid to his account.

A man, grinning slyly, had appeared on the scene,

whilst many hands assisted the raging Paul to his feet.

Poor Paul, a sorry object he was with the muck of the farmyard plastering his new flannel suit, his face streaked, his hair dishevelled, his expression altogether stony as he faced a giggling, unsympathetic group of schoolgirls.

Of course much of the laughter was hysterical, born of recent fright, and Mrs. Lysden, in charge of the party, hastened to offer both her handkerchief and condolences. But the insult of those peals of laughter had stung Paul's pride too deeply.

He even forgot his beautiful manners as he turned away.

"You can carry on, Peter," he told his brother in sulky and audible tones. "I'm blessed if I'm going to look after a rotten crowd of giggling idiots any more."

And away he marched, leaving the crowd of giggling idiots to whimper together in indignant undertones.

It was almost a relief to Mrs. Lysden to discover that Mogs was limping badly, and to find that the chestnut colt had had *some* sort of revenge on his captors by treading heavily on her foot.

A return to the lawns was hastened by the ringing of the tea-bell, and Mogs, limping behind, would have claimed the help of Pernillia, who she wanted to talk to, but Penny was hurrying to join the party

with Gilda for comrade. As they passed Mogs, evidently not noticing her, Penny was eagerly giving some message to her chum.

"Paul says we *must* come," she laughed, "all three of us. They'll be waiting in the lane at five o'clock to-morrow. I said *yes*."

Mogs drew a deep breath, then limped sturdily forward.

"And I say *no*," she said.

CHAPTER XI

THE JOY RIDE

BOTH Penny and Gilda gave a little cry of anger. Penny went white.

"You were eavesdropping," she accused.

"No, I was not," retorted Mogs. "I was trying to catch up the others. I'm as large as life, so you ought to have seen me. Anyway, I *did* hear; and it's just what I thought was happening. Now, are you going to play the game? If you don't, I shall report to Topsy. *Exactly* as you wish, I don't care."

She had her own way of talking. It was forceful.

Penny looked as if she meant to cry. Gilda scowled.

"Very funny, Mogs," she retorted, "and, of course, you don't even wait to hear if we had leave or not. I intend to ask Mrs. Hinford if the boys can take us out for a spin to-morrow. I don't suppose she will mind in the least. We can ask Mademoiselle, who is a good sport."

"All right," said Mogs, "if you are asking Topsy, I've no more to say."

And she limped on without another word.

Paul had arrived back at the Castle before the

girls, and Mrs. Mingleton did not greet the latter with quite so much geniality, though she made a fuss of Mogs and called her a plucky girl. She even wanted to send for a doctor to see the bruised foot, but Mogs only laughed. She was a good deal more worried over Penny than over her foot.

"I suppose those other girls are paying her expenses," she decided. "She wouldn't be able to keep pace with them if she has no money. I wonder. Retta can't be trusted. I believe I'd be the best sort of friend by reporting it."

She could not join the merry party on the lawns after tea, nor would she allow Sara or Gaby to stay with her.

To her surprise, however, Penny found her lying on the sofa in Mrs. Mingleton's dainty boudoir.

Penny looked "all hot and flustered," and inclined at first to be tearful.

"You were my first friend, Mogs," she coaxed, "and you *are* a friend now. You won't say a word to Mary Ann about—about our going out. She goes off the deep end at once as though we were paupers. But I don't ask her for money for my jaunts."

"Of course you don't," agreed Mogs dryly, "you know quite well she hasn't got any. Does Retta finance you, or are you borrowing off Gilda, who has a bit of the Jew moneylender in her?"

Penny blazed at once.

"You've *no* right to talk of my friends in that

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way," she said. "I hate people who try to be sarcastic, and don't believe you care two pins about me."

"Yes, I do," replied Mogs quietly, "and it is because I am fond of you—goodness knows why!—that I want to help you to go straight. You're *not* going straight, and you'll go a regular howler if you are not careful. Don't be silly, Penny, those are only temper tears. Smile and be chums."

But Pernillia only jumped up, defiant and angry.

"I don't want your friendship *or* advice," she stormed, "I only want a plain answer to my question. Are you going to sneak or are you not?"

Mogs looked at the speaker, her eyes grave and pitying.

"There's nothing to sneak about," she replied. "Retta tells me Mrs. Hinford will know all about the joy ride, so that ends the matter. I hope you'll enjoy it."

The appearance of Peter put an end to the talk. He had been sent with some grapes for the heroine Mogs, on whom he looked with cold disfavour. Penny had gone up to him at once, and he put his hand on her shoulder as he surveyed Mogs.

"So you've been bullying the kid," he said in lordly tones. "Don't you think it would be better to mind your own business?"

Mogs grinned.

"About the joy ride?" she said. "Oh, it's all right. Retta is asking the Head."

She could not help enjoying the young man's look of blank dismay as he and Penny turned away.

That settled it. They evidently had no smallest intention of asking Topsy's leave, so it was up to her to speak or to be silent.

And there was no beating about the bush with Mogs, who went her own way in complete unconcern as to whether she were popular or not. She said nothing about the conversation overheard so openly; in fact, she did not even mention it to Mary Ann.

But she was not going to shut her eyes and look the other way.

Mary Ann had appealed for help, and she knew very well that Penny *was* in danger of breaking rules and perhaps getting expelled.

Mrs. Hiaford trusted her girls, and expelled them if they failed her.

Mogs, more worried than she cared to admit, puzzled the matter over and must have found a solution, though a certain trio watched her in vain for any sign or symptom of sneaking. Mogs did not sneak, but she was taking people at their word, and was determined to make them face up to it.

It was at teatime next day that she found the opportunity for which she was waiting.

Retta and Gilda ate steadily, but Penny seemed too excited to tackle the bread and butter and marmalade.

Mogs, seated opposite within a short distance of Miss Dane, leaned across.

"You'll be hungry before you get back from your motor ride, Penny," said she. "Did you get leave from the Head all right? You'll have to hurry."

Somehow silence had fallen around. Mary Ann, close to her sister, leaned forward too.

"Are you going for a *motor* ride, Pen?" she asked. "Who with?"

Mogs helped herself to more bread and butter; she had noticed that Miss Dane listened too, and felt her work was done. Sara and Gaby just gaped. They saw something was happening under their noses, but did not quite fathom it. Penny had gone from red to white, and grimaced hideously at her sister, whose perplexity was patent.

Miss Dane's deep voice boomed in:

"Answer when you are spoken to, Penny," she said. "I did not know you were going out."

Penny bent her head over her plate. Miss Dane looked at Mogs.

"What motor ride are you speaking of, Mogs?" she asked.

Mogs nodded towards Retta. If looks could have killed . . .

"It is not a secret, Miss Dane," she said. "Retta and Gilda were asking Mrs. Hinford's permission to go for a motor ride, and I was just asking Penny if they got it."

Retta shrugged.

"As a matter of fact the motor ride is put off," she said, "so I didn't bother Mrs. Hinford. Mogs is out to make mischief, that's all."

"*Nothing* was settled," drawled Gilda. "The young Mingletons asked us in a casual way, and Mogs overheard. What a thrill about nothing. I hate sneaks."

"So do I," agreed Mogs coolly, taking no notice of critical glances along the table, "but I fail to see where sneaking came in. I was not listening in your sense of the word, when Penny told you yesterday that Paul—or Peter—planned to take you three, Retta, Gilda, and Penny, for a joy ride. If there is any error, then, of course, they *won't* be waiting in the lane at five o'clock, and there was no need for me to bustle Penny. You told me yourself, Retta, you were asking leave."

Miss Dane looked very grave as she glanced at the clock.

"I am perfectly certain," she said, "that Mrs. Hinford never gave leave to any girl to go out motor-ing with young lads like the Mingletons. But it is easily proved as to who is telling the truth. Retta and Gilda, it is five minutes to five; you can both come with me as far as the lane. I hope Gilda's explanation will show Mogs had misunderstood. When grace has been said you two girls can remain behind."

For once the girls crowded out of the dining-room in silence, only to make up for it when they reached the Long Gallery, where, for the next hour, they were free to amuse themselves. Penny had tried to escape, but Mary Ann had pounced on her, and the two sisters went off alone.

Sara and Co. met in one of the deep alcoves of the Gallery. They were not quite sure how to treat Mogs, who showed no fear of standing on her trial amongst pals.

"It was a pity," she said, "but I had to do it for Penny's sake. I *hope* this will open her eyes."

"I hate bringing in the gobs," grumbled Wanda. "After all, there *are* things *we* do which we should not want discussed at the tea-table."

But Sara had decided as to her cue.

"If Retta had promised to tell Topsy, Mogs was within her rights," she said, "and I agree with her. She broke no confidence. If she doubted Retta's truthfulness that's neither here nor there. It was Retta's lie, *of course*, and I think Mogs was plucky to say what she did. If there'd been an accident she would never have forgiven herself."

Mogs smiled. She was more glad of Sara's approval than she cared to say.

As for Mary Ann, it was she, all tears and gratitude, who came to tell the tale.

"Mogs, you are a *brick*," she said. "Of course



"Mogs, you are a brick," she said.

Penny is mad, so are Retta and Gilda. They look murderous. Peter and Paul were there waiting, and fairly choked when Miss Dane told them off. You can guess what the Dane said. She called them anything but gentlemen, and said the Head would complain to their parents. In fact, she did her best, I suppose, to patronize them into penitence. But

from all accounts they motored off growling and muttering like a thunderstorm.

"Retta and Gilga squealed and played the distracted heroines, condemning Mogs to deepest depths. Poor old Mogs! *Dear* old Mogs! Your back is so broad, and just think of what might have happened if you'd let it slide. Penny might have been killed—or expelled. There will be a row, naturally, but nothing like what might have been. Oh!"

And Mary Ann fairly sobbed.

"Penny won't speak to me," she gulped; "but Topsy will be on the look-out now. I'm not nearly so responsible. Poor old Penny can't see she is being made a cat's-paw of, but she will in time—the darling."

The "darling" did not show any signs of illumination in the immediate present.

Gaby did her best to read the riot act when she saw her snubbing her sister, but Penny only muttered and sneered.

"I shall choose my own friends and be loyal to them," she told Mary Ann; "you've only made us all more determined. We are going to enjoy life, and if we are expelled, we are. Who cares?"

It seemed hopeless to attempt to argue with any one in such a state as this. And Sara told Mary Ann the best thing possible was to leave her sister alone.

"Give those other girls enough rope and they'll hang themselves," was her cheerful summing-up.

There was nothing else for Mary Ann to do but take the friendly advice—but she could not be content.

Penny's pretty face was growing hard with defiance, and most perplexing of all was the fact she no longer troubled to hide. She had plenty of money to spend—though not one farthing came Mary Ann's way.

Who *could* be financing the girl? Where could she be getting so many new and dainty things to wear?

CHAPTER XII

A SPRING-CLEANING

“A-BLACKBERRYING we will go,” sang Gaby, dancing into the little classroom which Mrs. Hinford had given up to the friends.

That was like Mrs. Hinford. She did not shut her eyes to the friendships and cliques that the girls formed, and she was quite ready to encourage those with the true spirit of sport.

“They may get into mischief,” the headmistress told Miss Alys, when the latter questioned the wisdom of letting that little band of adventure lovers get together, “but there is no real harm in it. If they disobey they will be punished; but so long as it does not go too far I rather like that spirit of adventure in girls or boys, so long as it does not lead into definite wrongdoing. If they went for a moonlight picnic I should change their rooms, put Miss Barker in charge of the ringleaders, but I should not be really angry or contemplate expelling them as I expelled Annette Fandin last year for smoking cigarettes and reading contraband novels.”

“Blackberrying,” mocked Sara, “when there is

real work on hand. I've been talking to Alec; there's a spot of work we can do to help."

Gaby grinned. She had seen the twinkle in Sara's eyes.

"Anyhow, the blackberrying game won't come off till Saturday," she said. "Cook is making jam on Monday. We are guaranteeing thirty pounds, and we'll get it. Now what about Alec? He'll have to help on Saturday."

"*This*," said Sara, "is Wednesday, and the work is planned for 2.15 p.m. this afternoon. We may be late for prep, but it won't matter as we are having tea at the manse. The minister will be there, and Alec has promised hot potato scones. I have promised to do the job with your help."

Gaby beckoned to Wanda and Mary Ann who were playing cat's cradle on the window-ledge.

"Work," she said. "Are you prepared? You'll have to be next term. Miss Alys is starting Girl Guides. Now, Sara."

"This parish," said Sara, looking serenely sweet, "is not altogether easy. Some of the people are powerful good. Some are trying. The M'Brides are trying."

"Don't know 'em," said Gaby. "What do they do? Shall we find out the secret of their sins or——"

"There's no *secret*," scoffed Sara, "it's soap and water. Their 'bit cottage' is too dirty for words,

and on Monday the widowed daughter and her bairn are coming back to live here. The widow is a treasure of a woman, and earns her living by making lace, and sewing. • Alec says his father has offered Mrs. M'Bride to have in a woman—two women—and pay them to clean up, but they refuse. It's just obstinacy. The old lady can't really see properly, and she says there's nae dust about. Alec says his father is really terribly worried, as Ella won't stay if the place is dirty, and she hasn't money enough to live elsewhere. I told Alec *we* would help."

"But *how*?" asked her listeners; but Gaby's lips began to twitch.

"If we make a subscription," said Gaby, "I've got a bob I can spare. Alec knows a woman who will take the old pair to the 'peectures.' Mrs. M'Lean's husband will lend his cart. That's just all the help we need. Of course Alec will lend a hand."

"At what?" asked Wanda suspiciously.

Sara beamed.

"Spring-cleaning," she said; "it's *such* fun. I've helped the maids at home sometimes, and I know how it's done. We shall start as soon as the M'Brides have gone—and Mrs. M'Lean is asking them to tea after the 'peectures.' It is their day out and our day *in*. Of course it is convenient, being the afternoon that the juniors are having a special 'lecture,' and our time is our own. Now, let me think. Wanda, will you be responsible for the soap?"

"It's a crazy idea," grumbled Wanda, "and we shall all have *fleas*, but I suppose I must."

"I'll get the soda and scrubbing-brushes," chuckled Gaby. "Mary Ann, you needn't bother, for I know Sara is itching to get Vim and polish."

How they laughed when once they had got used to the idea. It would be fun—and a good turn. The thought of the M'Brides' gratitude was pleasant to think of.

What a surprise it would be.

They found Alec waiting for them near the wee cottage which stood in a tangle of garden just beyond the hilly village street.

He looked somewhat startled, poor lad, to see the bevy of "housemaids" bearing down on him.

"We dressed in the playshed," giggled Mary Ann, who in the fun of the game had forgotten her cares.

"You've got the pails, good lad," said Sara.

"*What*," asked Alec, "have you got on your heads?"

"Dusters," said Sara briskly. "We use 'em after the sweeping and scrubbing. Take off your jacket, Alec. We have two hours and a half to spring clean this cottage, and we *must* scheme things.

"Scrubbing-brushes and soap forward. Alec, you can do the tiles in the kitchen. Come along, mates."

They came along. Laughing at first, but quickly serious.

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"We *must* open the windows," gasped Gaby, "or we shall *die*."

"You might have told us 'to bring eau-de-Cologne," grumbled Wanda. "I never smelt such a stuffy smell in my life. The windows can never have been opened."

"We've got to work," said Sara, "we can't leave it now. Ugh!"

They worked in silence till Mary Ann gave a squeal of anguish and rolled over.

"W-what," panted Sara, who had suffered in silence.

"Crawly things," moaned Mary Ann. "Alec, come here; bring disinfectant. Oh, horrors."

Alec, convulsed with laughter, appeared.

"If only dad could see us—or Janet," said he.

"They'd flee," said Gaby grimly. "Sara, you are forbidden to have any more ideas till the end of term."

"Where," asked Sara, "is Mogs? She's a base deserter."

"The *last* I should have thought," said Wanda gloomily. "I shan't believe in what Winks calls her 'sterling qualities' any more."

"She is coming," said Alec, sniggering, "down the hill with Mrs. M'Lean."

The girls looked at each other, then fled out to welcome the new-comer.

How Mrs. M'Lean did laugh at them; but she entered into the spirit of the fray too.

"I ken Ella Mackay," said she. "She's a braw lassie, and for her sake I'll do ma bit. But dinna tell auld Mither M'Bride I've been in her cot. Ye'll tak' the blame, bairns, and Ella's bit thanks. It's my Megsie will see the auld carlines and Robbie hae their tea."

It was surprising how differently Mrs. M'Lean tackled that job. She worked on other lines, but they were marvellously successful.

She had praise for willing workers too.

"Ye'll be mair sparín' of the soda," she said; "and not sæ much water on the boards, laddie, or it's a sair chill Robbie will hae in his back."

"It *needs* water," protested Sara. "Did you ever see so much dirt in your life?"

But Mrs. M'Lean was kindly of soul, and had an excuse ready.

"It wasn't ivver so, lassie," she replied. "I ken the day when Biddy M'Bride was as proud as any one of her bit hoose. And then the trouble cam'. There was smallpox i' the village and there was fear on all sides. Biddy had her Ella awa at the time, but her Donald, as braw a lad of ten year as any could get sight of, was hame.

"Then the message cam' that no doctor could be had, and Margaret Purvis' dyin' wi' her five weans round her. There was nane who had the knowledge o' sickness like Biddy, an' awa she went to the help of her neebor. Margaret got better, her

weans were spared, but Biddy brought hame the smallpox, an' when she got better of it 'twas to find her Donald doffined. After that the speerit went oot o' the puir woman. She cared nae mair for makin' money or keepin' a clean hoose. That's some reason for puir Biddy."

It was indeed, and there were no more criticisms, though by six o'clock you *never* saw such a set of tinkers as the house-cleaning party.

Mrs. M'Lean, as tidy as when she started the job, laughed at them as she left them very much "under the pump," whilst she hastened home before *her* good deed was found out.

There was a clean white cloth on the kitchen table, a meal all ready in spite of the fact that the old pair had had one, and a smiling "ambush" to watch the joy of the old couple.

Here they came, wrinkled, grubby, a trifle dour, yet well pleased with their day out till . . .

They had reached the "bit hoose," they had entered the well-scrubbed kitchen . . . and now, as Alec and the girls drew near to hear the pæan of thankfulness, the sound of loud lamentations broke on their ear.

"Whaur be the auld jug?" screamed Biddy M'Bride.

"Whaur the deil's ma pipe?" roared Geordie.

"Wha's been makin' free wi' ma kitchen, eh?" shrieked Mrs. M'Bride. "It's the police ye'll

ca' in, Geordie. There's been thieves here, an' rubbed ma bed-warmer till it's scratched the brass, e-eh ! ”

White with indignation, Sara and Alec led the way.

“ *We've cleaned your house,* ” Sara stormed ; “ we've washed and scrubbed and made it fit to live in. Aren't you going to thank us ? ”

“ E-eh ! ” shrieked Biddy ; “ and meenister's son too. It's ill wark ye've been doin' ye meddlesome bairns. I'll tell the meenister. Whaur's ye lassies' manners to enter a ceevil body's hoose an' drench it wi' water an' spoil her best bits. E-eh, it's the police . . . it's Robin Ellis I'll hae teach ye to com' creepin' in to steal an' spoil. *Clean !* A'll teach ye to insult Biddy M'Bride. I'll . . . ”

But here Sara and Gaby broke in.

“ Never, *never*, ” gasped Sara, “ will I try to help any one again. Look at us, you ungrateful old woman. We've worked for *hours* . . . and then . . . and then . . . ”

It was as well that Mary Ann in quavering tones suggested flight—or retreat.

In a body, draggled and disgusted, they marched past the little houses where women and children stared after them, some, having an inkling of the truth, laughing as they told each other there was nae saying what the Sassenach leddies would be doing.

But there *was* a happier sequel to the spring-

cleaning of Biddy, M'Bride, for some days later, when Alec was entertaining his visitors to tea at the manse, a neat-looking, middle-aged woman called and introduced herself as Mrs. M'Bride's widowed daughter who had come to thank the minister's son and the young school ladies for their kindness.

"Mrs. M'Lean, tauld me," said Ella gently, "and it made me greet wi' thankfulness to hear o' such kindness. Heaven bless ye all for what's been a blessing. My faither an' mither baith wish to thank ye for the guid work which they understand better noo."

That was comforting, but, as Gaby remarked, the best part was that no one at Culloch House heard the story of the good deed which was not appreciated.

"But next time," said Wanda, in those solemn tones of hers as she ate a plum with the suspicion that a wasp might have been before her, "we will *only* think of ourselves. Don't you think it is time to find something quite new to do? I'll tell you what I should rather like. To go out right through Gaby's secret passage and find a ploughed field—a really big one—Farmer M'Lean's would do. And we'd read the rig . . . one at a time or . . . in different fields. What?"

They wanted to know, of course, what reading the rig might mean, and Wanda, with relish, told the tale Grizel the housemaid had related to her the day before.



"A'll teach ye to insult Biddy M'Bride."

"It's *specially* for Hallowe'en," she said, "and it's no use to come to school in Scotland if you don't follow Scottish customs. You need not read the rig if you don't want to. Grizel's friend went mad, but he must have been soft. Come close and I'll tell you how it happened."

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They gathered round, thrilled already. Wanda was a good story-teller if there was anything creepy to be told.

"It was Grizel's cousin's young man, Alan Dale," she said. "He was awfully in love with his Jean, but she wasn't so keen. She wanted some one with more money. Alan was only a fisherman, and she wanted to marry a shopkeeper.

"Alan was told if he took the trouble to go to Edinburgh he might 'get under the skin' of a rich uncle.

"Alan didn't mind the trouble, but he was rather nervous about going, or of changing from fisher to shopman.

"So some one suggested his reading the rig. He had to go at midnight one Hallowe'en and stand in the ninth furrow of a lonely ploughed field. He would then hear sounds to guide him as to the right 'profession' to follow.

"So away went Alan to listen hopefully for the splash of oars and the swish of fishing nets.

"But Jean's other young man and friends played a trick on him, playing the pipes to a funeral march.

"Alan rushed away, fell into the river, and in spite of all efforts was drowned.

"Grizel says that shows the reading of the rig was right. I call it . . ."

"We'll decide what to call it," said Gaby,

"after you have read the rig. You're just the one to do it, Wanda."

Sara chuckled.

"I don't *know*," she replied. • "I rather think we'll take the hint, but—not a word."

CHAPTER XIII

BLACKBERRYING

“**I** WONDER,” said Mary Ann mournfully, “if Penny is ever going to forgive me for finding that dress of hers and trying to discover where she gets her money from ? ”

Mogs shook her head.

“ I can’t understand Penny,” she said. “ When she came first to school she seemed such a dear little soul. Kiddish, I own, but so pleased to be friends with me. Of course,” added Mogs, in her blunt way, “ I know I’m not attractive ; and I hated coming to school. The boys had been chaffing me, saying I should come home with red lips and pink nails and not want to join a rat-hunt or ride old Bobs bare back. I vowed I should be just the same, and I came to school with my back against the wall, not *wanting* to be friends with any of the girls. It was because Penny seemed forlorn and not wanted that I palled up. And now—I’m sorry.”

So was Mary Ann. She had never dreamed that Penny’s resentment was going to last for days like this, and as she noted her sister going off with either Retta or Gilda, watching eager-eyed for either of the

other girls to take any notice of her, Mary Ann wondered whether it were fair even to think of writing home.

"She must be awfully fond of them," thought Mary Ann, "and I am *sure* they must be giving her money and presents, or asking their friends to. Penny's pride is such a queer thing. She wants to be as big as other people, but she doesn't mind taking their *charity*. At least she *can't* mind, for she must be doing it."

Mogs's sympathy was sincere and consoling, but it did not heal the breach. To-day Mary Ann decided that she would have one more trial, and if it failed she must "let things rip" a bit.

Girls were forbidden to visit each other's bedrooms, but Gilda was seated on Mary Ann's bed when its owner marched in. Penny, standing by an open drawer at her chest of drawers, flushed crimson at sight of her sister, and pushed the drawer to.

"What on earth do you want now?" asked Gilda irritably.

Mary Ann stared.

"Not *you*," she replied, more directly than was usual with her, "and you know you are not allowed in this room."

"Dear little saint," drawled Gilda, "how full of virtue it is! You ought to be a better girl, Pernillia, with such an example before you."

Penny shut the drawer with a bang.

"I wish you would get out, Mary Ann," she snapped. "Always poking and prying about. Leave me alone."

Mary Ann gulped.

"This happens to be my bedroom," she said grimly, "and I came to change into my old clothes for blackberrying. W-won't you come too, Penny?"

Gilda howled, but Penny turned on her sister in unmistakable wrath.

"No, I *won't*," she replied. "I'm not a kid, and I have not the smallest wish to tear myself to pieces to get fruit for Topsy. She makes money enough out of us as it is. Let her buy her own jam. And if you *are* going, then go. Don't hang about."

Mary Ann turned away. She felt the blackberrying expedition was spoiled already, but she was too hurt now to shed tears.

Penny had never spoken quite so unkindly before. She dressed in her old navy blue and turned to the door, noticing that Penny had evidently been making fun behind her back.

Oh! it was hurtful—and—her own sister. . . .

Yet at the door curiosity overcame her indignation.

"What *are* you going to do, Penny," she asked, "if you are not coming? All the school is going. You'll—be missed."

"Mind your own business," snapped Penny. "What a nuisance you are."

"Of course she is," agreed Gaby cheerfully, as

she joined Mary Ann on the threshold. "Any one would be a nuisance to you at the moment, Penny-a-liner, who tried to make you go straight. It's a pity Mary Ann wastes her valuable breath on you. You'll come whining to her presently when you've got stuck in the mud—and been left there by your noble friends."

"Don't take any notice, Penny," drawled Gilda. "Gaby is always famous for her tongue. We'd better go and find Retta, eh?"

They went out arm-in-arm, whispering and laughing.

Gaby tucked her own arm through Mary Ann's.

"They're impossible," she said; "but Penny's only showing off because she thinks it is grand. A little bird whispers to me that before very long those two elders will be properly in the soup. Your friend, Mrs. Lysden, has her eye on them. Come and find Mogs. She is in the nursery playing with Barry. Mrs. Lysden has given her leave to take him blackberrying as his nurse has toothache. Mrs. L. spoke as if she were coming too."

They found Mogs, as Gaby had said, dressing an excited Barry.

"Me am going blackbewwyng," said Barry solemnly. "Me am going to have mine own basket; an' my *dear* ickle Mogs is going to pick all ve pwickly ones."

Of course I am," agreed Mogs cheerfully.

"Hold up your leg, Barry, and let me button your gaiters. Now we're ready."

"Now we're weddy," echoed Barry. "Come 'long, Gaby, or we'll all be late."

"Me too?" asked Mary Ann. She was rather shy with children as a rule, but Barry was such a friendly little chap.

It was rather a surprise to find Mrs. Lysden was not coming; she had told Mogs at luncheon she had changed her mind owing to some work she had to see to.

"We are going to Anloch Woods," said Miss Dane briskly.

Miss Dane was as keen as any of her charges over this blackberrying. Having promised thirty pounds of fruit, she felt it was up to the honour of the school to produce it. On the whole she led enthusiasts to the scene of action.

It was at least a mile's walk to Anloch Woods, and on the way Sara had a brain wave.

"Owls that we are," she said to Gaby as they took a short cut to join the "advance guard," "why have we never got up at 4 a.m. to go mush-rooming? Think of the joy of it. If only I can, or ever do, conquer my sleepy head at home on summer mornings I rejoice exceedingly. There's no time like 5 a.m. in which to feel young and all-conquering. Don't forget! Mushrooming is scheduled before too late."



Anloch Woods were reached at last.

“It’s too late now,” objected Gaby, “it’s the middle of October. This is the last blackberrying. At home the villagers say the devil turns his tail on blackberries picked after the twentieth, and to-day is the sixteenth. I am not too keen on the dewy dawn, and it isn’t even light till about 7 a.m.”

Anloch Woods were reached at last, and Anloch moors lay around, with plenty of hollows and clumps of trees where prambles hung heavy with fruit and showing all the beauty of red and purple foliage.

The girls scattered, Mogs keeping to the woods and not too far from Miss Dane, as she had Barry in tow.

Sara and Gaby lingered in her neighbourhood at first. Barry's chatter was intriguing, and his excitement intense.

"I like to pull ve blackbewwies mine self," he told Mogs, "an' I want your big stick to pull ve pwickles' down."

He certainly took all Mogs's time, and did not seem interested even in his friends Gaby and Mary Ann.

"You can go all by yourselves to dat over bush," he told them, "'acos Mogs an' me wants to tell secrets."

"Unkind Barry," laughed Gaby, pretending to cry, "you don't love me a little bit."

"I *does*," he replied, his tender heart smiting him as he clutched at Gaby's hand. "I loves you a big ickle bit, but not a whole big lot like I loves my Mogs."

How they laughed, trying vainly to coax him from the allegiance, whilst Mogs went stolidly on with her blackberrying, a small grin on her face as much as to say :

"Barry's faithful."

And faithful he was, though presently he went off in chase of a *sweet* little bunny rabbit which came out of its hole to say good-afternoon.

There was no peace for Mogs after that till she sat down beside the hole with Barry on her lap and told him the story of "Mr. Flopsy Long Ears and those Wicked Foxes."

It was no use to suggest that Mogs should hand over her charge to Miss Dane, who was tying up one of the girls' bruised ankle. Barry ruled his Mogs with a rod of iron, and so the others left her, smiling with kindly admiration.

"You wouldn't think old Mogs would be so taken up with a kiddie, would you?" said Gaby, "and she's as gentle as an old woman with him. However prickly a bear she is to others she's a fairy princess to him. It's rather nice."

Gaby nodded.

"It's *that*," she replied, "which is Mogs's charm. She's as jolly and sporty as any boy. I suppose that's what makes her brothers adore her; but she has a kind of *motherly* way too. She'd be a topping nurse for wounded soldiers when she's grown up—do you know what I mean? She's sweet as well as rough and ready. Dear old Oliver Cromwell, she *may* go to her goal bald-headed, but she'd only hurt herself. I believe she'd stand still under fire to pick up a kiddie who had tumbled down."

Sara sighed.

"We shall end in seeing she is a heroine," she said, "and wishing some one could say of us as we do of her—'that's old Mogs's way of doing business.'"

"Isn't that Alec?," asked Mary Ann, pointing to where a boy came running towards them over the heather. "He looks quite excited over something."

It was Alec who had been hunting for them in the woods.

"I can show you a much better place," he said. "Come along to the Prince's Hollow. The story goes that Prince Charlie hid there when the soldiers were after him. They nearly had him, too, for some one spied and would have betrayed him. It was a miserly farmer, but he had a jolly good son, who suspected his father's intentions and managed to tie him up. The father was so furious that he handed his son over to the soldiers and then had to stand by and see him shot. Of course that finished the old blighter, and he went mad. Anyway, there are no blackberries like the ones in Prince's Hollow."

He was right. And how they picked! The only thing that troubled them was a growing thirst.

"How far are we from the river?" pined Gaby. "I must have a drink. Miss Dane said it was unnecessary to bring cold tea or even water, but I knew after salt beef and treacle pudding I should have a thirst."

"There's old Barbara's place," said Alec,

"but you'll have to be careful if you go there. She's the queerest old carline. Some days she'll be all smiles, and give you milk or water, or anything she has. But when the 'mood' is on her she's really daft—and quarrelsome too."

"We'll risk it," said Sara. "I'm as thirsty as Gaby. Is she really mad, Alec?"

"Some people say she is," replied Alec. "She had a brother Sandy who ran the farm with her when she was young. Sandy, I believe, was everything in her eyes, and then something went wrong. Sandy was wanted by the police and fled. No one heard anything of him, I believe, for a week: Then back he came and Barbara hid him. But the police and some spiteful neighbour and his son called, and though Barbara succeeded in hiding Sandy, the strain brought on brain fever. Sandy had vanished. They said he was wanted for murder, and Barbara was never quite 'her nainsel' again. She has worked the little farm, kept a couple of cows and some pigs, and—existed. She says Sandy will come back one day. He has been proved innocent after nearly twenty years, but *he can* never have heard it, and they dare not tell her. It's awfully sad . . . and I'm too sorry for Barbara to be afraid of her—but she doesn't like boys or men; sometimes she dislikes every one. What about that drink?"

But the girls would not be put off; and after all there was no sign of the old woman about as

they ventured towards the tumble-down little "cot" with its outbuildings all but ruins.

There was a jug—and water in plenty in two great pails. How thirstily they drank, setting their blackberries down and then prowling round towards the barn in the hope of seeing old Barbara.

They had their wish soon enough, for, as they came out presently from the barn where they expected to find the woman, they saw her standing there, her grey hair hanging in wisps round her head, a big stick grasped in her hand..

It was easy to see this was one of old Barbara's bad days.

CHAPTER XIV

SANDY -

SHE asked no questions but came straight towards them, brandishing her stick threateningly.

"I ken ye," she screamed, "I ken ye! But he's not here. Ye'll no find puir Sandy if ye look for him a year an' mair. Begone wi' you, ye murdering villains! Wad ye hang an innocent mon? E-eh! an' ye wad break the hear-rt out o' him wi' yer searchings. It's old Barbara will teach ye the noo."

"Quick," urged Alec, "we shall only worry the poor soul if we stay here. She's coming, and if we let her get round to the back she'll have her dog, Laddie, out on us. He's a brute too. Now run!"

He didn't run himself, though, but moved quickly back towards the kitchen, drawing the angry woman away from pursuit of the girls. Gaby, Wanda, and Mary Ann fled helter-skelter in blind obedience. It seemed, quite rightly, the kindest thing to do.

But Sara had suddenly remembered the blackberries, and, watching her opportunity, dodged old

Barbara, who was hurrying after Alec as he moved towards the house by another route.

As long as old Barbara with her stick were sole pursuer all was well, but Alec's aim was to draw her away from the kennel of the half-breed dog which was barking its challenge near.

Alas ! for old Barbara. Seeing Sara, she swung round to clutch her, but, slipping on the stones, fell with a cry of pain.

Instantly both girl and boy had gone to her assistance.

Poor old soul ! Her distress and fear were pitiful to see, but Alec and Sara, misunderstanding her agitation, only made matters worse.

"Water," urged Alec, and Sara ran at once towards the kitchen, pursued by cries of anger and pleading.

Sara, believing the poor crazed brain was thinking only that there were pursuers in search of a hidden criminal, ran on.

But old Barbara's cries had attracted some one else, and as Sara reached the threshold of the tumble-down little dwelling a man, grey-haired and sun-blackened, came out.

Man and girl collided, then sprang back. The man shrinking in terror, yet with threat in his blue eyes, whilst Sara, agape at first, suddenly read the meaning of the riddle.

"Sandy !" she gasped.



Man and girl collided, then sprang back.

The man looked wildly round, though whether for weapon or flight she had no time to determine. She saw one thing instantly. Sandy was in hiding. The old woman's fears were genuine enough . . .

agonized enough. She had been ready to fight those intruders who she believed had come, as they had come twenty years before, for her brother.

But Sara remembered something else, and out went her hands.

"Sandy," she repeated shrilly, "it's all right. We're friends. And oh! don't you *know*? You are proved to be innocent at last. You're proved. Every one knows you—you never killed any one. There's no need to hide. Every one will welcome you."

He stared at her, seeing in this fair, pretty lass with her long plaits and strange-toned voice some angel of deliverance, so that dropping into a chair he burst into tears.

It was Sara who met Alec and the still half-fainting, wholly despairing woman who had insisted on staggering to her home. It was Sara who flung her arms round old Barbara and cried her tale of good news in her ear. Somehow old Barbara was quicker to understand than Sandy had been, whilst Alec was there to name the man who in dying had confessed his crime.

Down went old Barbara's stick as with tears streaming and her eyes already shining with joy she allowed these unexpected friends to help her into her kitchen.

"Sandy," the listeners heard her cry. "Heh, mon! the Lord has heard our bit prayers at long

last. It's your nainsel is clear before a' the worrld, Sandy, lad."

Slowly Alec and Sara made their way across the grass-grown yard.

Round the corner of the old barn they saw Gaby peering anxious-eyed. They had come back, poor dears, to help "pick up the pieces," as they said afterwards.

Sara was crying; she couldn't help it.

It had been so pathetic to see Sandy stand up and open his arms for old Barbara, the faithful sister of so many years.

"We couldn't stay," said Alec, as he patted Sara on the back and looked at the three fugitives with a queer little smile which suggested "a lump in the throat."

They would all have liked to go back, but hesitated. It must be such a "verra," great moment in those two lives, and yet no doubt the brother and sister would be wanting to hear all the tale of how Sandy's name had been cleared.

Hesitation was overcome by the appearance of Sandy himself standing in the doorway waving a basket.

That decided it. They must get their blackberries!

So back they went, and—what a greeting they had!

Both Sandy and his sister were talking at once,

and talking so fast, too, that it seemed nothing would ever stop them.

Want of breath won them to silence at last, and they sat staring and blinking at Alec as though he and the fair lassie were messengers from heaven.

And Alec told the story well. He spoke of the long search for Sandy, who, it appeared, had fled to Glasgow, nearly starved, gone aboard a ship, sailed to America, remaining with varying fortunes till at last he had returned with a bag full of money, meaning to find Barbara and persuade her to come "awa" and live in comfort.

But alas ! Sandy's bag or money had been stolen, and he had reached the old farm half starved.

The sister, knowing nothing of her brother's proved innocence, looked upon as an old mad woman who might make trouble if she were told a long-dead brother had been falsely accused, had hidden him in her home, living in terror of a second visit from the dreaded police.

The joy of the pair was intense. The pride with which Barbara spoke of going to the town with her "brither" and claiming the money long since due to him as compensation was good to see.

"We must be going," urged Sara at last, "the others will have gone home."

They had to shake hands though, once more listen to untold blessings, and then *run* at top speed back to the woods.

Of course they were late. Miss Dane had taken her flock home, leaving a man whom she had enlisted to help her to organize further search for the party whom she suspected of wholly forgetting the time in their zeal for fruit—and jam.

“Lucky we have our blackberries, plus a good excuse,” laughed Sara as, having left Alec at the door of the manse, they took the shortest way home through Stone House Woods.

“Lucky no one ‘preserves’ here,” added Gaby. “I wonder if the mysterious Felix Brown is still living in there. If we weren’t so late I’d peep over the wall.”

“I thought I heard the dog,” replied Sara, looking back. “Sultan has a wonderful voice, and I expect he has wonderful teeth.”

“Shall we keep to the wall or go to the left?” asked Mary Ann. “I—oh dear! I believe I was right. Isn’t that the Indian—Musty something?—and look, he is talking to *some* one, *quarrelling* with some one . . . and I do believe it is Mrs. Lysden.”

The girls came to a halt. They might be late for tea, they might get lectured for their delay and for forgetfulness of Miss Dane’s orders, but it was impossible to turn away down that other path till they had tiptoed forward to see if those two dimly seen figures standing under Stone House garden wall *could* be the Indian servant and their own mistress.

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A few steps, Sara leading, then a signal, anxious, imperative, as they all crouched behind a clump of bushes.

Not only were the two in front recognized now, but they could see Mrs. Lysden was drawing back towards the bole of a gigantic oak as though more easily to face the Indian, who, bending slightly forward, his right hand partly raised to give emphasis to his words, was only too evidently speaking in threatening language.

The girls, kneeling near, held their breath in excitement and wonder. Mary Ann was wishing Alec were still with them, whilst Sara thanked heaven that Mogs and Barry were absent.

Mrs. Lysden was standing more erect now, her profile pale but proud as she listened to the Indian's low-spoken torrent of words.

The girls could not hear what was being said, but there was no mistaking the Indian's attitude.

He was actually *daring* now to threaten a white woman. It was too much for Sara, who gave a sharp little cry and sprang forward, ready to interfere, to challenge, and to assist.

She had thought the man's thin brown hands would in another moment have been round Mrs. Lysden's throat, but if he had had any murderous intentions the woman herself showed no fear, she did not even turn her head as Mustog Ali, leaping back, turned, saw the four girls, and, with a very

unpleasant expression on his dark face, sprang towards the wall and was over it in a trice.

"Oh!" gasped Sara, reaching Mrs. Lysden first, "how awful. The brute! What was he saying, Mrs. Lysden? I—I thought he was going to kill you."

The other was very white. In the reaction they could see she was very near fainting, and they admired the courage with which she rallied.

"My *dear* girls," she smiled, "how splendid of you! Oh, that man? Well, I don't think for a moment he would have hurt me, but I am very grateful to you all for coming to my assistance, and not at all sorry you drove him away."

Her laugh was shaken and mirthless, but there was relief in her eyes as she looked round.

"Mogs . . ." she began, and Sara made haste to reply.

"Mogs didn't come with us to-day," she said. "She was looking after Barry, who was having a grand time. We went too far and—and when we got back to the rendezvous the others had gone. So, you see, we are lucky to be under your wing after all."

"We will all make haste home together," smiled Mrs. Lysden. "I think it is sweet of Mogs to give up her pleasure and her pals for my Barry. And . . ." she hesitated, looking again from one to the other of her would-be rescuers, seeing in all the same look of honesty and loyalty.

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"My dears," she said impulsively, "I know I can trust you four. And will you promise me not to say anything about my having met the—the black servant of—of Mr. Felix Brown? I should be very grateful—and perhaps you will try not to perplex yourselves about the matter. It is my private business."

She spoke the last words very sadly, and the girls answered in a breath.

"Of *course*, Mrs. Lysden, we won't say one word to any one."

"Even," added Sara bravely, "to ourselves."

And it was on her shoulder that the mistress's hand rested in silent gratitude.

CHAPTER XV

AT THE CASTLE

"I HAVE asked Mrs. Hinford," said Penny hurriedly, "to let me change my room. Miss Barker has been nice about it, Mary Ann, and she has moved my things. You are going to have Mogs with you, and I am going . . ."

"To Retta and Gilda," concluded Mary Ann. "All right, Penny, I've done my best, so has Mogs. But I can't stand this sort of thing any longer. I shall write home."

Penny only laughed. She was very excited and in too great a hurry even to quarrel with her sister.

"Write as much as you like," she said flippantly, "I don't care. You're no saint yourself. Every one knows the sort of crowd you belong to. I expect the lot of you will be expelled before the term is over."

Mary Ann stood with wrung hands.

"I wish the term were over," she whispered. "I—I don't know why. I love my chums, I like the governesses. Culloch House is just darling. But something makes me afraid."

Penny shrugged her shoulders.

"Liver!" she mocked. "Go and get dosed by Miss Barker. I adore school, and Retta is asking me home for Christmas week. It will be thrilling."

Mary Ann stared. The black shadow grew blacker.

"You can't go," she protested. "Retta's people are rich, you aren't. Dad couldn't even afford the extra railway fare. Penny, *do* confess! Do tell me where you get your money from."

"Not from you," teased Penny, and danced away. She didn't even want to quarrel with silly old Mary Ann. Now she was with her friends all would be easy.

"I'll dress before they come up," she decided. "I can make an excuse about having a headache. Miss Barker likes me, that's a good egg! I'll hop along now and do a bit of humbugging."

She did not find that difficult.

Those big eyes of hers could look very soft and pleading, and Miss Barker loved beauty. She was quite ready to believe her sweet little Penny had a bad headache and ought to go to bed; the only trouble was her anxiety to fuss after the invalid.

But Penny was a "wangler," and after accepting eau-de-Cologne and swallowing sal volatile, went off in triumph to her new quarters.

What fun she was going to have.

Peter and Paul had been wild with the sneaks who had put Miss Dane on their track, and, taking

the bull by the horns, had given a gay and highly coloured version of the "bit of fun" to their mother.

Big and masterful as Mrs. Mingleton was, those boys of hers could twist her round their little finger.

So she laughed at the "joke," pitied the girls who had lost their innocent fun, and was quite ready to allow Peter and Paul to coax her into inviting or allowing the three "dear girls" from Culloch House to come to the little dance which her boys had got up themselves.

There was a gay house-party at the Castle, and the friends were quite amused at the twin 'hosts' temerity in getting three fruant schoolgirls to join the fun.

Peter and Paul were to motor round to the school, where they would boldly await their three "guests" half-way up the back drive. . .

"You boys had better not mention it to your father and aunts," grinned Mrs. Mingleton, who made a very great point about being her boys' "big comrade" and "elder sister Mum"; "he would feel it his duty to protest and uphold law and order. But, my *dears*, where would there be any sport or spirit of youth in life if we were all out for law and order? There's not a spot of harm in the kiddies coming to have a frolic, and they wouldn't enjoy it half as much if they weren't breaking a rule and having a great adventure."

And the crowd of "young things" collected by

Peter and Paul cheered wildly, and called her a good old sport and a "topping old dear."

Some half-dozen of the straighter people, chiefly young married couples, thought it a pity, and a middle-aged painter groaned to a colleague that he had no use for wretched flappers who were being patted on the back for sheer disobedience.

And meantime the three giddy little "flappers" were feeling tremendously grown-up and important in their scheming. Retta and Gilda had phoned through in the early evening to ask Peter if he could fix up with the "family Nanny" to let them have some "hole or corner" in which to dress. This was so obviously the safest plan, the only trouble being that they did not choose to include Penny in this arrangement.

In fact, Gilda had been half inclined to leave Penny out of it altogether. She had been made too much fuss of, received too much admiration, and, in fact, threatened to eclipse her patronesses.

It was, to Penny's mind, a clear case of Cinderella over again, and *this* Cinderella was going to astonish them with her dazzling appearance.

Having coaxed Miss Barker, and being sure now of having the bedroom to herself for the next hour, Penny began her toilet.

She was trembling with excitement as she washed and powdered, touched her already rosy lips with Gilda's lipstick, powdered her dainty little nose,

fastened a slender wreath of shaded leaves round her curls, and then, in an ecstasy, slipped into the pale green frock with its soft lace and embroideries. She really *did* make a radiant picture of girlish loveliness, and it was with a feeling of intoxication that the foolish child carefully drew out a row of sparkling brilliants and corals and fastened it round her neck.

She stood enthralled by the picture reflected in the mirror when the door opened and Mogs came in.

There had been no thought of spying on Mogs's part. She had forgotten a mackintosh hanging behind the curtain, and had run upstairs to remove it to her new quarters.

It had been the best of news to Mogs that she was to share the room with Mary Ann and Gaby. She had hated her former companions' society as much as Retta and Gilda had hated hers.

She had been as prickly and difficult as she could be—and that was saying much !

She was smiling to herself as she entered the room, and thought how splendidly her "awkwardness" had been rewarded.

The vision of Pernillia not only startled her but brought back to her mind some news that she had heard not half an hour ago.

"*Penny !*" she gasped.

Penny was round in a flash.

"You spy!" she gasped. "Oh, you spy! Mary Ann has told you; you came on purpose. But you shan't stop me. You shan't!"

Mogs had her back to the door, she was staring hard, not at the lovely, angry little face, but at the sparkling stones of the necklet Penny wore.

"I haven't the least wish to stop you," said Mogs in her stolid way. "I expect there are plenty of people who will be doing that later on. But before you go I should like you to tell me if the gipsies you are so fond of gave you that necklace?"

Something in Mogs's unruffled tones startled the listener. With a quick backward glance at herself Penny moved towards the bed where lay her ulster with its hood.

"It's no business of yours," she flared. "*Sneak!*"

"Not at all," said Mogs, "and I shouldn't bother, only at one time I thought you were my friend; and so I am going to tell you what Jessie, the second housemaid, was telling me just now when I was putting my things away."

"I don't care what Jessie told you," retorted Penny, still defiant as she slipped into the distasteful ulster which was to make a Cinderella of her again.

"It was about a burglary, or rather theft," said Mogs, "at Culloch Castle last Saturday. One of the servants there, a young girl called Ann, fell in love with a handsome gipsy boy. On Saturday evening she ran away and took with her some of Mrs. Mingle-

ton's jewellery. Nothing very valuable, as the valuables were locked in the safe, but amongst other things was a necklace of brilliants and corals which Mrs. Mingleton prized as a gift from her father when she was seventeen.

"Wear it, if you and your friends *are* going to the Castle, if you like; but if you are arrested for theft you are going to be badly up against it. The police are very wideawake about the gipsies at the moment, and you see, Penny, two and two make four. You and Mary Ann came here *very* poor. You were always bemoaning your poverty, and told me yourself you had five shillings pocket-money to last the term.

"Then all at once you launch out. You have money to burn. Mary Ann hasn't a penny, and is worried to death to know if you are borrowing off Gilda and Retta.

"I know the story of the gipsy charm. I saw you with the gipsies in Jacobites' Glen, and to-night you are wearing a necklace stolen from Mrs. Mingleton's jewel-box."

Pernillia had listened without interruption. As Mogs continued in that quiet, humdrum voice of hers, she had gradually grown paler and paler, her eyes dilated, her lips parted, and when Mogs finished she gave such a cry of terror as brought the other girl at once to her side.

With trembling hands Penny tore at the necklace,

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which, coming unfastened, fell on the floor in a little shimmering heap.

Mogs stooped and picked it up.

"Well," she said, "are you going to tell me?"

Penny looked as if she were going to faint, then, with a cry, she clutched at Mogs's arm.

"Mogs! Mogs!" she whispered, "is it true? Oh, you're making it up; you are trying to frighten me. It—it is not true?"

"It is perfectly true," said Mogs. "If you don't believe me put on your necklace and go to the dance."

And she held out the necklet.

But Penny refused to take it.

"No, *no*," she panted, "I won't touch it, I daren't touch it. Oh, Mogs, help me, for—it is true. The gipsies *did* give it to me. Mother Judith's son, Jacob, gave it me. They've given me lots of things—and money, lots of money. They said I was one of them because my name was Pernillia. They said I must share their wealth. I've been to them. I—I found your secret way. I followed Sara and Gaby and learned the secret. I've been, oh! I *daren't* tell you where I've been, they might kill me. Oh, Mogs, have pity on me. I'm terrified. They said they had been rich for generations, and that I was so beautiful I must have beautiful things. I thought it all belonged to them. I did, honestly and truthfully, and now they've made me a thief. And I've spent the money. Pounds of it. I never told

Retta and Gilda. I pretended I had a rich godfather who gave me things, and did not tell Mary Ann. I”

“Steady,” said Mogs. “Have Retta and Gilda seen this necklace?”

“No,” said Penny, shivering, “they’ve not seen it. I wanted to make them jealous. I wanted to surprise them. They *are* jealous because I told them Paul said I was the prettiest girl he had ever seen. Oh, what shall I do? I shall be arrested. I shall be sent to prison. I am—afraid.”

“Some one is coming,” said Mogs; “that’ll be your pals. What shall I do with *this*?” And she again held out the necklet.

“Keep it, keep it,” pleaded Penny, “and I’ll think of a way to get it back. You keep it at present. I promise Mrs. Mingleton shall have it—or I’ll give it back to the gipsies. Yes, I’ll do that. I’ll give them back all their presents, then I’ll be safe. Only keep it now.”

And Mogs, half reluctant, though pitying this girl whom she still felt affection for, slipped the necklet into her pocket as the door opened and Retta and Gilda came in.

How they stared at sight of Mogs! But Mogs was not afraid of their scowls. She hardly thought of them, she was so shocked and bewildered by Penny’s confession.

It was easily understood, and the gipsies had

probably hardly realized themselves the danger into which they were putting the girl they paid homage to as the namesake of one of their leaders.

But no sooner had Mogs gone than Retta turned to Penny.

"Why in the world didn't you lock the door, you little idiot?" she cried. "Now, that great lump of a girl will go and sneak to the gobs. She'll tell Mrs. Lysden, I'm sure of it, and that's the end of everything. The widow hates us."

"I wish we'd never had anything to do with a kid like you," went on Gilda contemptuously, "you haven't the heart of a mouse. What are you crying about now? Here, make haste, we must be off. Look at the time, Retta; we *can't* keep the boys waiting."

"Are you coming?" Retta asked Penny coldly; "it's not much use if you're going to howl like a baby. Oh, come on, or don't come. Do one thing or the other."

But Penny was already pulling off her ulster. She was naturally highly strung, and the very thought of prison was terrible to her. She was shivering and sobbing now on the verge of hysteria, and only shook her head violently in answer to the question.

"No, I'm not coming," she said. "I've got a headache. I—I don't *want* to come."

She was tearing off the wreath; pulling the pretty frock off with feverish hands.



"Why didn't you lock the door, you little idiot?"

Retta and Gilda stared. • They were not ill-pleased to go without the fascinating Pernillia; but, on the other hand, Peter and Paul would ask questions, be disappointed, probably think it was their fault keeping a younger girl in the background.

But it was getting late, and they had to dress when they reached the Castle!

"This is the last time we ask you," was Retta's parting shot; "letting us down in this way."

"Don't go sneaking to the beloved Mogs," sneered Gilda.

But for once Penny was heedless of gibes or sarcasm.

She wanted to get into bed and hide under the bedclothes, hoping now, that Miss Barker would come in and prescribe for her.

There was nothing sham about her headache now, and yet a moment or two after she was in bed she was out again, gathering up her shimmering party frock, collecting stockings, shoes, and wreath, and thrusting them down into the depths of her drawer. Then, with a sob of pain and weariness, she crept back to bed and closed her eyes.

Would Mogs come, and would Mogs help her? If only she knew where to find Jacob or other of her gipsy friends; but there was no appointment . . . and she would not be likely to see them now till Saturday at earliest. Mother Judith had even spoken of the possibility of their going away, and had asked her if she would like to come with them.

Perhaps they had meant to *steal* her as they had stolen those jewels.

To and fro tossed Penny, working herself up into a fever, so that when Miss Barker came in she shook her head, and after fetching a big warm rug, carried off the moaning child to the sickroom.

And what a relief it was ! At any rate she would not hear for the present about the theft at the Castle or—the search for a coral necklace.

Meantime Gilda and Retta were all smiles again by the time they reached the waiting car, though they were not prepared for such exclamations of disappointment as greeted the non-appearance of Penny.

“ I’ve a good mind to brave Topsy and Co. and fetch the poor kiddie along,” declared Paul. “ What in the world stopped her ? ”

Retta shrugged, whilst Gilda explained.

“ Can’t think,” she declared. “ She was all made up and dressed for the party ; then went into hysterics and said she was too frightened to come. Anyhow, we couldn’t wait. She began to undress before we left. Must have a touch of ’flu, or cold feet, I should say.”

“ It’s a miserable shame,” grumbled Paul. “ She’s the most amusing kid, and dances like a fairy. She’s not going to play the dirty on us like this again. We must get the mater on to it. She’ll be disappointed too ; she thinks quite a lot of Penny.”

Gilda looked at Retta. It was high time Miss Pernillia faded into the background.

However, they weren’t going to allow the Mingletons to think they had been treating Penny as a Cinderella, and made smiling promises of bringing Penny along the very next day.

They were late, of course, and found their dresses had been laid aside and could not at first be found. Then Retta's gloves were missing, Gilda's stocking had a hole, they could *not* do their hair properly, and when they did appear most of the dancers already had their partners, and though the boys did their best they were too busy to spare the two "flappers" much time.

Secretly, too, Paul was blaming them for Penny's non-appearance. Retta and Gilda were all right, and sporty, but they had been giving themselves too many grown-up airs, and were being laughed at in consequence.

Retta's indignation reached its height when Mr. Mingleton came and sat down beside her, and told her it was a pity such a child as she was copied her elders by using that filthy lipstick.

Retta just couldn't answer! Whilst Mr. Mingleton, growing quite fatherly in his talk, asked how she and her friend had got leave to come, shook his head as he saw her hesitation and heightened colour, and was advising her to tell that kind headmistress next morning, when a servant hurried in, agitated and pale, to whisper some news which sent the master of the house hastily from the room.

Mrs. Mingleton, seeing her husband's exit, called to the servant, who came reluctantly yet with obvious self-importance.

"Burglars again, madam," those nearest to Mrs.

Mingleton heard him say. "They got the safe open this time, madam, right under our noses as it were. It must have been whilst you were at dinner; but they were disturbed from the look of things, and ain't taken everything."

"Not taken everything indeed!" stormed Mrs. Mingleton, too agitated to trouble about the feelings of her guests. "I should hope not. Here, Peter, Paul, come with me. Burglars again—at the safe."

Of course there was a rush for the door. One or two of the girls screamed, the men pushed their way into the passage, the music stopped.

Gilda and Retta, left in the ballroom, almost entirely deserted now, glared at each other.

"I wish we hadn't come," said Gilda crossly. "I'm not enjoying it a bit. I do think Paul or Peter could take some trouble about introducing us."

"And burglars!" shivered Retta. "They may be hiding in the Castle. The boys will *have* to motor us back. I wish we could go now. Only I'd have liked supper first."

"Naturally," retorted Gilda. "I should think we *should* like supper first. Why, we've not been here an hour. Now we've come I mean to stay. I don't see how the Mingletons can desert their guests even if they have got burglars in the house."

At this moment back came Paul in a light overcoat and hat.

"I'm motoring in to Dorloch, girls," he said

hastily. "Those brutes have put the telephone out of action. Get on your coats at the double and I'll drop you at the school. Get a move on, there's sports."

He didn't even apologize.

Gilda looked as if she were going to rebel, Retta was white with temper, but there was no help for it. The girls had to hurry off in search of their things. There was no time to change their dresses. The maid who was in attendance almost bundled them into their coats; they grabbed wildly at stray possessions and then fled, without even time to change their shoes.

Mr. Mingleton was in the hall with his son. He looked worried, and angry too.

"Make haste, make haste, young ladies," he said irritably. "I thought you understood my son was in a hurry."

"Come on, girls," urged Paul. "Never mind about good-nights."

Speechless with indignation, altogether unsympathetic about the serious loss their hosts had sustained, the girls climbed into the car.

A fine rain was falling, and, as a very last straw, Paul pulled up at the school gates instead of taking them along the lane to the side door nearest the house.

"Must leave you here, girls," he said briefly. "I've got to bustle. Night-night. Sorry."

He left the girls standing by the open gate ready to cry.

The rain was falling faster. Retta slipped, and in recovering, caught her heel in her dainty frock, whilst Gilda screamed in panic as a man loomed out of the shadows, passing them quickly.

With one accord the girls fled up the drive, panting in terror. The very harmless workman on his way home from some night work was to them a desperate villain, prepared to rob them of their treasured trinkets.

The scullery door had been left open by a maid already bribed, but all was in darkness, and as they groped their way across to the inner door Retta moaned out a conviction that the floor was covered with black beetles.

They reached the shelter of their own room at last—wet, muddied, with dishevelled finery, and having lost several items of their own clothing.

“Of all vulgar, ill-bred people I’ve ever met, those Mingletons are the worst,” sobbed Retta. “I’ll never go near them again. Peter and Paul are cads to ask us and then treat us in this way.”

“I only hope the burglars have taken everything,” added Gilda viciously; “and, oh dear, my frock is absolutely spoiled, and I shan’t have another for Christmas.”

“I’ve left my blouse and stockings behind me,” muttered Retta. “If the boys have any decency

they'll manage to see us to-morrow, bring back our things, and apologize."

"I shan't accept it if they do," retorted Gilda. "Oh, dear, my hair is soaking. I shall have an awful cold."

"Do leave off whining," was Retta's retort. "I want to go to sleep. The band'll play to-morrow if Miss Barker finds our evening-dresses in this state."

"The end," mocked Gilda, "of a perfect day. After all, Penhy had the best of it."

"And will probably have a fit of penitence and sneak," said Retta, having the last word.

CHAPTER XVI/

THE BURGLARY/

“WHAT’S wrong with every one?” asked Sara, in an undertone, to Gaby, as the girls took their places in class next morning, waiting for Miss Dane’s appearance.

Gaby shrugged.

“Mary Ann is fussing about Penny,” she replied. “I believe Penny has a cold, or an attack of nerves, and is in the sickroom. I heard Mademoiselle tell Mogs to go and see her when classes were over. That rather upset Mary Ann, who had a bit of a row with Penny yesterday evening, and blames herself now, saying it is all her fault that Penny is ill.”

“We’ll have to think of something really cheerful,” laughed Sara, “and give Mary Ann a leading part. We’ve not had our mushrooming yet, eh?”

“Too late,” croaked Wanda. “There was a frost last night, so good-bye mushrooms and blackberries. It strikes me we shall find bonnie Scotland chillsome in winter.”

They were laughing at her, talking of the delights of tobogganing and skating, when Miss Alys and Miss Dane came in together.

Miss Alys had a small parcel and took it across to where Gilda and Retta stood by the window looking cold, cross, and pale too.

"A servant has just called with this parcel from the Castle, Gilda," she said in her sternest tones. "Jessie says he told her to say that Mrs. Mingleton was sorry you left them behind last night in your hurry, and to tell you how sorry they were your enjoyment had been cut short."

Gilda flushed up to her forehead as she took the parcel.

"Thank you very much," she said, and would have turned away had not Miss Dane checked her.

"First of all, Gilda," she said, "we expect you and Retta to give a full explanation of that extraordinary message. We have not been to Mrs. Hinford yet, we do not wish to worry her if you girls can explain. If not, one of us will go to the Castle and ask Mrs. Mingleton to tell us."

Gilda laughed, whilst Retta looked alarmed, though she tried to carry it off with as high a hand as her friend.

"It is quite easily explained, Miss Dane," said Gilda. "We went over to the Castle yesterday evening at Mrs. Mingleton's invitation. They had a few friends for a dance, and they thought we should enjoy it. We changed our frocks at the Castle. As a matter of fact we didn't stay long. Burglars had broken in and the Mingletons lost their jewellery and

their manners. Retta and I came home absolutely fed up."

There had been silence in the room during the speech, delivered in Gilda's clear voice. Even Retta was appalled at her friend's daring.

There could only be one ending now to the escapade. Both girls knew Mrs. Hinford's rule for such a flagrant breach of trust, and Gilda, having nothing to fear from over-indulgent parents, was rather enjoying the prospect of returning home.

Dad at least would laugh at her "cheek," and at worst it would mean a governess or Paris for a year.

Retta was not so "fortunate." Her parents would be very angry at her expulsion, would want to be told every detail, might even come up to Scotland to interview the headmistress, which only too probably might lead to fresh discoveries of even more daring breaches of rules.

In the end Retta had a very lively fear that her mother's threat would be carried out, and she would be sent to a convent for two years.

But she could not explain away Gilda's words, or throw the blame on any one else. Both girls knew that Mrs. Hinford would not have a pleasant interview with Mrs. Mingleton.

Miss Dane did not leave any time for meditation, nor did she gratify certain of her pupils by storming at Gilda. She and Miss Alys drew aside to speak

together, then beckoned the culprits out of the room.

"We will go on with the class," said Mrs. Lysden quietly. "Gaby, will you read the opening paragraphs in your literature book, page fifty-three? I want you girls to show your loyalty by giving all your attention."

There was something in the usually strict governess's tones which sounded very like an appeal, and Gaby responded instantly.

They had not *been* interested in Thomas Chatterton's suicide, or in the great men of genius who passed into review around that epoch, but before the lesson was over Mrs. Lysden had the eyes of all her girls riveted, and at the close of the class she actually smiled her gratitude.

"Girls," she said, "you have been sports, and I thank you. I confess I had a bad headache, but your collaboration has helped to drive it away. I have enjoyed the class and your intelligent answers."

Sara patted Gaby on the back as they left the room.

"It's proud we ought to be," said she. "I really have been intelligent, and it is a far nicer feeling than boredom. We must buck up, Gaby, old thing, and try a spot of industry."

Gaby was not so sure.

"There's going to be a thunderstorm," she said. "Yes, inside and out. It's a nuisance as I wanted to

go down to the manse to talk to Alec. I wish some one in the neighbourhood would interest themselves in Mustog Ali. He is responsible, I'm sure, for Mrs. Lysden's headache."

"There's Jessie," said Sara, "she looks distinctly important. I expect she had a real good gossip with the man who brought the parcel. Let's go and tackle her. I want to know about the burglary which Gilda launched at our heads. I don't wonder that the excitement put her off her mental balance. I'm half sorry for Retta, but on the whole we'll be happier without those two. Mary Ann will know peace of mind, and we'll try and coax that vain little cat Penny to behave herself. Lucky kid being on the sick list."

Jessie was half afraid to repeat the gossip she had heard, and kept hunching her left shoulder shyly to her ear as she answered Sara's questions.

"It's about the burglary we want to know, Jess," urged Gaby persuasively. "Never mind about the truants! I daresay I'd have gone off to the hop if I'd been asked, and if I'd had a dress. But what of the burglary?"

Jessie twisted her apron round her hands. She was a "local" girl and this was her first place.

"Hecks! it was a big business, missies," said she. "Faither has gone up to the Castle to see about it. They say that whaur the police were at fault was that they didna tak' tent of the thievin'

last week. There's a footman at the Castle, Colin Carr, who swears he saw some gipsies run across the terrace and into the bushes just as dinner was being served. The police say it's gipsies ha'e done it, and ane or twa' o' the band ha'e learned to pick locks like professionals. 'There'll be a huntin' and a searchin' in Culloch and a', for I've heard it's a fortune of a hunner pound English money to be given to any who can get the jewellery back and lead to the thieves bein' jailed."

"Chance for you, Gaby," laughed Sara, "but I'm sorry the gipsies are suspected. I rather like them, the kiddies are so pretty, and there's a romance about them. I'd have loved to explore Gipsy-town."

Jessie, overhearing, shook her head.

"Ye'll never do that, missie," she said, "there's always been talk of Gipsy-toon but it's as fast locked as fairyland, ye ken, and ill luck to those wha would find the key."

The girls laughed and passed on; but Jessie's information had given them food for thought.

It might be as well to keep clear of Jacobites' Glen and gipsy-haunted places if the gipsies were really thieves.

Mary Ann was hanging about looking depressed.

"Penny isn't a bit well," she said. "She keeps crying, and her temperature is over one hundred degrees. She has to stay in bed. I—I wish she would let me stay with her, but she only wants



" Penny isn't a bit well," she said.

Mogs. Mogs is with her now ; I believe I'm almost jealous."

" Duffer," chaffed Sara, " come down to the gym and join in the giants' stride and ladder climbing. We've got to work like smoke to-day to keep up our good character."

There was plenty of talking, but games were

listlessly played or else neglected. In spite of scoldings the girls would talk of nothing but Gilda and Retta. Miss Alys came out to start net-ball, but no one enthused.

Neither of the girls "in disgrace" appeared at dinner, and after the meal Mrs. Hinford spoke to her pupils.

"It is better for you to hear from *me*," she said, "that Gilda and Retta are leaving Culloch House early to-morrow. You know my rule, you know my theory. The youngest of you can understand. Retta and Gilda have not only done a wrong thing. That could have been punished and forgiven. But they have proved absolutely untrustworthy, and one of them at least is only amused at being found out. I am more sorry for those girls than I can say. But that is not your business. All I wish you to understand is that any girl found deliberately showing herself untrustworthy and disloyal will leave Culloch House at once.

"There is one other point.

"I have been to Culloch Castle, and I am sorry to say Mrs. Mingleton does not agree with me in the least. She thinks the girls did a sporting if disobedient thing. She considers my punishment extremely harsh. She has even gone so far as saying she shall ask Gilda and Retta's parents to allow the girls to come and stay with her.

"Under those circumstances I have told her the

Castle will be placed out of bounds, and none of my pupils will be allowed to accept her hospitality. It is better for me to say no more on a very distasteful subject."

So Retta and Gilda were to be expelled.

The girls went back to the schoolroom for their short rest, feeling rather awed and dismayed. Some of the more reasonable declared they saw the Head's viewpoint at once, and that they were glad the rule-breakers were going.

Others were inclined to pity both Retta and Gilda, whilst several questions were asked about Penny.

"Clever kid to sham sick whilst her pals were going through it," said Mary Miller, the "fat" girl of the school.

But Gaby flared up at once.

"Bosh," she retorted. "Penny didn't go dancing, so she wasn't in the row at all, and she's not shamming, she's ill. Don't be a cat, Mary, *Miaow*."

"Oh, funny!" mocked Mary, and there would have been a lively quarrel had not Mademoiselle interfered.

Mary Ann had not followed her friends, but gone in search of Miss Dane, who rather liked the shabby little hoyden.

The girl's white face won instant sympathy, for Miss Dane had the kindest heart under a severe manner.

"It's—about Penny," gasped Mary Ann; "she'll be feeling awful about Retta and Gilda. But she didn't go to the dance, Miss Dane. She *has* been about with them, and I—I've been so worried. I'm worried now. I believe Penny's making herself ill over having joined those two in their sport. Couldn't she be forgiven. Mrs. Hinford *won't* expel her?"

"No," said Miss Dane, "you poor little champion. It's you who are making yourself ill over your sister's misdeeds. When Penny is better we will have a friendly chat and get her to confess. But I am sure you are right. Penny has been too easily led. I can answer for it that she will get another chance."

And Mary Ann turned away greatly comforted.

"I'll go and tell Penny right now," she decided, "it'll make her so much better. She ought to be glad the others are going. *I* am. We'll be jolly as can be, and I know my pals will cheer up Penny."

But, alas! the smiling messenger brought no answering smile to Penny's cheeks as she listened to Mary Ann's tale.

"I'm *not* going to talk to Miss Dane or any one," she cried, moving restlessly in bed. "You had no business to say I was in Gilda and Retta's set. I'll not confess anything. There—there is nothing to confess. Oh, I wish Mogs would come. Mogs is my friend. She stuck by me from the first when

you went off with your pals. I love Mogs. I don't want you to stay, Mary Ann. I want Mogs. Don't write home though. I—I—oh, I wish I had never come to this school!"

"You'd better run away, my dear," said Miss Barker, finding her patient in tears, and Mary Ann looking as dismal as could be. "You'd better run away, and Penny will be better after her dinner. Mogs is coming to sit with her as soon as lessons are over, and Penny likes having her."

Yes, Penny liked having Mogs but had nothing to say to Mary Ann, who went out of the sickroom wondering what dreadful thing she had done to turn her sister from her.

CHAPTER XVII

MOGS TO THE RESCUE

“COME close, Mogs. Oh, dear Mogs, come close and tell me. Oh, do tell me all about everything.”

Penny was pleading now, clutching Mogs's hand in hers, looking at her with entreaty in her dark eyes.

Mogs was not excitable, but she was worried.

“I've got the necklace,” she said stolidly, “it's beastly to have to keep it, but I don't really see what we are to do. I mean, if you tell the truth you'll have to tell the whole truth, and you say the gispies have given you quite a lot of money. I *expect* it was stolen.”

“I know,” said Penny, gulping down a sob, “and I've spent it. I can't pay any one back. So I simply daren't tell any one; besides, the gipsies would have revenge on me if I told. Oh dear! Why *did* mother call me Pernillia!”

Mogs's laugh was rather heartless.

“It's late in the day to start blaming your mother,” she remarked. “Pull yourself together,

Penny; being ill won't help you one little bit. Just tell me what you would like me to do with the necklace."

"What about the *burglary*?" asked Penny. "Are the burglars caught, and were they gipsies? If they were they—they might say they had given me the corals. I keep getting awful thoughts about it in my head, Mogs, it almost makes me mad."

"More duffer you," said Mogs, "there's nothing to go mad over. It's a rotten business. If I were you I'd go to Mrs. Hinford and tell her all about it. But, if you won't, I'll take the necklace anywhere you like. I daresay I could push it through the letter-box at the Castle."

"No," said Penny, "there would be inquiries. And detectives are so horribly, frightfully clever. I was given the necklace by Jacob, and I want you to give it back to him. It will be quite easy. He meets me on Friday evenings at six o'clock in the little chapel in the wood. I followed some of you down into the cellar weeks ago, and I found out about the secret passage. I've been down it twice, and Jacob waits in the chapel. Take the necklace back to him, and tell him I don't want it as I believe it was stolen. Tell him I don't *want* to belong to the gipsies any more, and that I don't want any more money. Then he'll go away."

Mogs did not reply at once. She was slow and

sure. She felt this "simple little errand" wanted thinking out.

But Penny was getting feverish again, and Miss Barker had told Mogs how very important it was that the invalid should be kept quiet.

"I will see this Jacob then," said Mogs, "and give him the necklet. I won't promise anything else. I hope later you will tell Mrs. Hinford. Wait till you are well and think it over. Poor Penny. I won't worry you now, but you'll see things differently when you haven't got the jim-jams."

She leant forward and quietly kissed the flushed face.

And for Mogs, undemonstrative as she was, to do such a thing was to Penny the seal of championship and friendship. Tears came into her pretty eyes, her lips quivered.

"*Dear Mogs,*" she said, "I knew you would not fail me."

Mogs nodded, half shy at her own show of feeling.

"You'd better not fail me then," she retorted gruffly. "Bring your courage to the sticking-point, you silly old Pennypiece."

Miss Barker came in then and Penny greeted her gaily.

"Mogs has done me a *lot* of good," she said. "I'm sure I shall go to sleep now and wake up quite well."



"Take the necklace back to him."

Miss Barker smiled at Mogs, who she liked in spite of untidy ways and manners, which Mademoiselle often called "uncouth."

"Then Mogs shall come again," she replied heartily. "She ought to be a Girl Guide, for she has done her good turn to-day."

And Mogs went out smiling to find Mary Ann "on the mat."

Mogs knew all about Mary Ann's jealousy, and was sorry about it too. It was very natural.

"Penny's better," she said shortly; "she is going to sleep."

Mary Ann gulped down tears.

"I *am* thankful," she whispered. "I know Mrs. Hinford was worried. They thought Penny was going to have brain fever. Do tell me, Mogs. Has she a secret that I ought to know?"

Mogs shook her head.

"She's got a secret," she replied, "but whether you ought to know or not I can't say. I only know I can't tell you."

For once Mary Ann flared.

"Then you ought to," she replied hotly. "Penny is my sister, and I have a right to know."

Mogs regarded the speaker with some curiosity.

"All right," she agreed, "then go and ask Penny. It is her secret. You don't suppose if I'm told a secret I'm going to blab it for sisters or uncles or any one else. But I'll tell you this. Knowing Penny's secret wouldn't help Penny, and it would only make you—jolly uncomfortable. I only wish you had had the confidence instead of me. That's that."

Mary Ann considered, but she had common sense, and Mogs was plain spoken.

"That sounds right," she said, "and if Penny is

grateful I expect I ought to be. Anyway, come along to the Council Chamber. Sara has been having a pow-wow with Miss Alys and wants to have a talk with us now. She looks dead serious over it, and I don't think it's particularly cheering, though Sara didn't say, and anyhow, we had meant to talk about the moonlight fishing party. Alec has a lovely story about the devil fish which lives at the bottom of the loch, and the Red Fisherman who tries to persuade midnight fishers to catch it."

But Mogs apparently was in one of her obstinate moods, for she only shook her head.

"Sorry," she said, "I can't come. Let me see, to-day is Friday, isn't it? Perhaps if you don't think me a dud you'll tell me about Miss Alys and Sara afterwards. I wouldn't wonder if it had to do with Gilda and Retta."

Mary Ann grimaced.

"Gaby was talking to Winks," she replied. "Winks has an awfully soft spot for Gaby, and she told her Topsy was really absolutely wild with the Mingletons, and told them she should tell Gilda and Retta's parents she considered they were the ones most to blame. Mrs. Mingleton isn't the sort of woman to be polite when she is in a tem, so I suppose there were feathers flying."

But Mogs had gone off into one of her brown studies, and was not even interested in the affairs of the Mingletons.

How thankful she would really have been to tell Mary Ann about Penny's folly. But Mogs had been taught by her many brothers that to break a confidence under any circumstances was deadly sin, and so, why! there was nothing for it but to soothe Penny's terrors and save the girl she pitied from serious illness.

That was the way Mogs looked at it, not yet having the wisdom of older years.

It was not too difficult to slip off after tea. Every one else seemed to have a job on.

There were the Christmas plays to be discussed and Christmas presents to be made. With the drawing in of October it really seemed as if winter were knocking at the door, though the weather had, on the whole, been unusually mild. This evening Mogs could not help shivering a little as she stole down the stone steps leading to "Gaby's Passage"—as she knew the other girls called it—though she had not been with the exploring party on that first occasion, and found some difficulty now in locating the secret.

Mogs loved old places, and Culloch House, with its history and legends, fascinated her. She was thinking of bygone days as she stole pluckily along in the darkness, only using her torch when very necessary.

How the brothers would love this place, and want to know some of the stories which "old cook"

had occasionally been wheedled to tell. Old cook and Mogs were friends and fellow-countrywomen, as Mogs had taken care to point out to the shrewd little Scotswoman, who still resented the coming of the English owners to "her people's" home.

Friends of the White Cockade, spies of Geordie's, had no doubt met and fought here. Mogs was thinking of Jacobite Jennie and her gallant sacrifice as she crept out into the wood where evening shadows lay so thickly.

She must make haste or—or it would be too dark to see the gipsy.

In this twilit wood, so lonely and so remote, Mogs had need of all her courage; and, as she moved towards the ruined chapel, her hands were clenched and her gaze restless.

"I hope he won't jump out on me," thought Mogs. "I wish I had asked Penny if there was any signal. She didn't think much of me, only of getting rid of the stolen necklace. I didn't know gipsies were really burglars as well as farmyard thieves. Perhaps it is just a clique."

She was standing, half hidden by wild raspberry canes and bushes, looking for a dry path through a watery morass, when her wandering glance noted a movement higher up the slope.

A man! No. Two men were stepping out from a side path towards the wider track.

Mogs was keen-eyed, but she had to look long

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through the shadows before she could be quite sure what manner of men they were. Her heart was beating more quickly, too, for she had recognized one now. It was Mustog Ali, the Indian servant of the mysterious Mr. Felix Brown, who lived at the Stone House. Yes, she recognized the silhouette quite easily as the man moved into a patch of clearer light. The turban, the long dark robe, were unmistakable. And his companion was evidently one of the gipsies, probably the very Jacob Smith she had come to see.

Mogs crouched down amongst the slender canes. She was interested in watching those two, puzzling that slowly thinking brain of hers.

How odd it seemed. The stately, "very superior" and dignified Indian having "truck" with the vagabond son of Ishmael who was being marked down as one of a band of housebreakers. They seemed to have quite a lot to say to each other. Mogs could not even hear the sound of their voices, and she had no intention of creeping nearer to listen, though she was curious and puzzled by the incident.

It was very uncomfortable in this damp resting-place, and she was deciding that it would soon be too dark to keep the tryst when she saw the two dark figures separate, the Indian hurrying away whilst the gipsy came back, running, towards the ruin.

Mogs wavered. She hated her job more than

ever, and though she would sturdily have denied the fact, she was the least bit afraid.

The wood was so lonely, and it was not as if the gipsy were an ordinary sort of peasant or working man.

She didn't like the idea that he had been hobnobbing with the Indian, but Penny would put herself into a fever if she brought the necklace back.

"Here goes," muttered Mogs, and heaved herself up.

There was nothing secret now about her movements.

She had given the gipsy time to reach the chapel. He would not suppose she had seen his former tryst, so on she plodded till she saw the slender, shabby figure move out from behind a broken wall.

"Jacob Smith," she called.

He came forward at once, his head bent forward.

"Little sister!" he answered. "Pernillia, little sister."

Ugh! the *idea* of Penny letting that rag-tag and bob-tail call her "little sister."

"I'm not Pernillia," she replied gruffly, "I am her friend. Pernillia is ill. She asked me to come and give Jacob Smith this necklace. She did not wish to keep it."

For the life of her she dared not add what Penny had said about the necklace being stolen property, and that she, Penny, had finished with her gipsy friends.

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Jacob Smith had taken the necklace, that was the chief thing, and Mogs, having no wish to remain in this toad-haunted ruin with such a companion, turned away.

Jacob Smith laughed, a very small, mocking laugh.

"The little sister was not wise," said he in his musical tones, "to send the *Giorgian* girl who is *afraid*."

And something in the emphasis of those last words made Mogs—who boasted she was never afraid of anything—take to her heels ; nor did she stop running, once she reached the hidden passage, till she had pushed back the secret door and stepped out into the cellar.

But her troubles were not over yet.

Imagine her surprise to find some half-dozen figures standing near the cellar steps and the voice of Miss Alys asking sternly who she was.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MYSTERIOUS INDIAN

"IT'S me," said Mogs, with no regard to grammar, and, as she spoke, she came panting across the cellar.

Really, Jacob Smith had given her the creeps!

She was blinking now at half a dozen flashlights focused on her, and she heard her chums' exclamation of surprise.

But what *was* Miss Alys doing with the crowd?

Miss Alys was not explaining.

"It is certainly time this passage was closed," she said gravely. "Where have you been, Mogs?"

"Into the wood," replied Mogs, "as far as the ruined chapel and back. There was a gipsy there, and I bolted."

To her relief Miss Alys found the explanation sufficient. She knew Mogs's love of prowling around on her own, searching for fossils and other weird objects of value to her collection.

It was Mary Ann who caught Mogs's hand in an apologetic grip. Of course Mary Ann would be guessing.

Never mind, the necklace was safe in the keeping of the original thieves, Penny's terrors would be allayed.

Miss Alys had to own to quite a thrill, apart from anything else, as she watched Gaby re-opening the door and leading the way down the passage.

"We are sure it must be haunted," said Sara in tones of relish. "I expect quite a lot of people have been murdered here."

And the laugh which answered her caught an unexpected echo which drifted far away down the passage.

"I must bring my mother to see this," said Miss Alys. "Of course she will be scandalized to think you girls have had the impudence and nerve to use such a back door ; but it was playing the game to confess."

"We had a special meeting," said Sara. "Mogs wasn't there, so you'll have to let her off. You know Mogs's ways. We felt those two, Gilda and Retta, had given Mrs. Hinford such shocks that we ought to be more careful about the 'spirit' of our given word. That's why we came along. I—er—suppose the back door will be locked in future?"

"Certainly," laughed Miss Alys, and just then Mary Ann gave a cry of alarm.

"A ghost!" she gasped. "Oh, I *know* I saw a ghost. It g-glided away along the wall. Oh!"



"It g-glided away along the wall."

There was a moment's huddling together, then Miss Alys went forward, followed by the girls.

But there was no sign or shadow of ghost, or of anything more substantial, and Mary Ann was told she had too vivid an imagination.

"Or a ghost eye," teased Gaby. "We must

have a look at you presently. Square-eyed people *can* see ghosts."

But no one *saw* anything worse than spiders in the secret passage that evening, and the explorers returned feeling terribly virtuous and—just a wee bit sad to think that they had closed their back door on themselves.

Mogs was sent for to say good-night to Penny, and this time Mary Ann only grinned in gratitude. She had a vague idea that Mogs had been interviewing some of Penny's gipsy friends, and was hopeful that it had been to say good-bye.

Penny was waiting, wakeful and eager, to have her mind set at rest. She kissed Mogs's hand in gratitude on hearing the necklace had been safely delivered, but seemed just a little bit disappointed to learn that Jacob Smith had had so little to say.

Mogs did not tell of her hasty exit, and slipped away before Penny had more questions to ask or more to say.

Lessons were *supposed* to have returned to a normal level next morning, and Mrs. Hinford set busy thoughts in another direction by asking Sara if she and her friends would like to go and help Mr. Fannock and his flock decorate their little church.

Culloch House girls attended the English church on the other side of the village as a rule, but certain

girls, amongst them the Mardeens, Sara, and Mogs, were allowed to go to the wee Scottish church of which Mr. Fannock was minister.

"I love decorating," said Sara, as the little party of friends set out, laden with flowers and vegetables from Culloch House gardens, which were Mrs. Hinford's contribution to the church. "And I like the interest Topsy takes in *both* churches. People are so fond of talking about Christian churches and chapels as if they were different religions. My dad always says 'Differences of *administration* but the same Lord,' but my dad is really good and every one loves him for being broad-minded. He hates anything narrow."

Alec was already busy at the wee church, helping every one, fetching string, scissors, and standing at times by his father in the porch "receiving" the gifts.

Two of the first to arrive were Sandy and Barbara M'Grath.

It was a real joy to see these two. The sad story of Sandy's unjust accusation and long exile had touched the hearts of many outside the narrow bounds of the village, and subscriptions had already flowed in to put the farm into proper repair and allow the brother and sister to employ the necessary labour.

Old Barbara looked ten years younger, whilst Sandy carried himself with a fine courage which

bore out his declaration that he had "mony a year o' work" in him yet.

They brought flowers from the tangle of old Barbara's garden, and vegetables bought in the market, as well as apples picked from the farm orchard.

They were delighted to see their "lad and lassies," and shook hands vigorously as they called down fresh blessings on their heads and told the kindly minister they would be coming every Sabbath to the wee kirk.

"And ye bairns maun come and see if auld Barbara has forgotten how to bake bannocks an' wee scones," the old woman urged. "Ye'll be welcome as the flowers o' spring, ye ken."

Yes, they *kenned* it well.

"It was worth coming to school in Scotland to put those darlings on the road to happiness," said Sara, looking round to speak to Alec.

But Alec, waving his arms, was half-way up the hill, and it did not take the girls one half-minute to follow when they saw what was amiss.

It was a startling sight, too, for Mustog Ali the Indian, without his faithful hound, was running down the hill, followed by half a dozen small urchins, who were yelling and hooting, even throwing stones.

As Alec and the girls charged to the rescue the Indian slipped and fell. But there was no time for his ragged pursuers to reach him.

Alec was chasing them, grim threats on his lips as he shouted that the minister would be telling their fathers.

Sara and Gaby were helping Mustog Ali to a boulder near. He was more shaken than hurt, but had given his ankle a nasty twist.

He showed no sign of recognition as he looked at his rescuers, but spoke in breathless anxiety.

"The sahib is ill," he groaned, "very ill indeed. It may be it is the will of Allah that he dies. But I come quickly for the doctor. His name is M'Gregor, a man of skill and much gentleness. But he must come quickly."

"I'll tell him," said Alec. "I know old—I mean Dr. M'Gregor. You wait here, Mustog Ali, and I'll skip along to the doctor's house. If he's in I know he will come at once." . . .

The Indian's gratitude was eager enough. He prayed for the blessings of Allah on the head of the young sahib, watching Alec with satisfaction as he ran on down the hill towards the village.

Gaby had brought water for the sufferer, and as she stepped back Sara touched her arm.

"Mogs wants me to go with her," she whispered, "back to the school. If possible let Mustog Ali wait for M'Gregor."

Gaby nodded. She guessed rightly that her chums were going to tell Mrs. Lysden of the sudden illness of the mysterious Felix Brown.

"I feel she ought to know," Mogs told Sara, as the two girls slipped off, unnoticed, they hoped, by the others. "Her secret, whatever it is, concerns Felix Brown, and I have an idea she would prefer going to the Stone House without seeing Mr. Mustog Ali, who definitely dislikes her."

"He has queer eyes," nodded Sara. "I don't mind saying he could easily scare me if he tried. I'm glad you thought of coming, we've left quite enough 'guard' to see those little imps don't bully the Indian. I hate when our people, big or little, don't play the game with regard to coloured people. It's absolutely rotten of them. There are bad and good in every race under the sun. I daresay Mustog Ali is a devoted old dog to his master, but he's like a bull terrier—only has one love."

They found Mrs. Lysden with Kirstie, the successor to Jennie, and Barry who was having a fine game, pretending to be "de big, bad wolf" who roared and roared *and* roared before he came out from behind a tree to devour Wed Widing-Hood—Kirstie—and was in turn chased by the kind man who wouldn't ever love big bad wolves.

He was trying to explain to Sara that the kind man in this case really *did* love Wolf Barry, whilst Mogs told Mrs. Lysden of the sick man at the Stone House.

And both girls knew they had done the right thing when they saw Elena Lysden's face.

She looked startled at first, then, as Mogs spoke of the Indian's fear that his master might die, she turned very white.

Calling Kirstie she whispered to her to take Barry indoors.

Then she held out her hands to the girls.

"My dears," she said softly, "I thank you. I thank you with all my heart. That you should *think* of me, not knowing my secret. That you should come to me in an hour of crisis on which hangs all my happiness. I can only say 'God bless you.'"

"And you are going to Stone House?" asked Mogs. "Will you be all right? Shall we come with you?"

Mrs. Lysden shook her head.

"No, I must go alone," she replied, answering the second question first; "but—will you *not* say anything to the governesses or to Mrs. Hinford as to where I have gone? I may be back in time for dinner, or I may not. There is so much I may have to do—or so little I can do."

"We'll help in any way we can," said Mogs sturdily, "and we won't say a word as to where you are. You can trust us."

"I know," said Mrs. Lysden, and smiled her gratitude as she moved away down the path.

Sara looked after her with a puzzled frown.

"I can't understand it a bit," she said, "but it

must be something awfully intriguing. Sometimes I wonder if it is the secret only which has brought Mrs. Lysden here, and not even the necessity to earn money."

I expect," replied Mogs, "we shall know now."

They returned towards the village, thoughtful and anxious, to be met by their companions without Alec.

"He got the doctor," said Mary Ann, "and he—I mean the doctor—went off with Mustog Ali, who was getting in a regular fuss. Alec offered to go back with them, but the Indian wasn't having any. Dr. M'Gregor looked glum; I don't think he was too pleased at being carted off, but that's that, and the minister sent thanks to both of you for your help. Every one says the kirk has never looked so pretty, and Mrs. M'Lean came along with Ella, who was sorry to miss you. Ella says she has settled down quite happily, and her parents let her do all the cleaning she wants to do. They were both laughing over our 'good deed,' and say it was one of the 'verra best.' Mrs. M'Lean wanted to know if Mrs. Hinford would let us all go to the farm on Wednesday evening for the Hallowe'en games. We'd better get round Mademoiselle and invite her to come with us. She loves 'fortunes' and looking into the future. Alys and Merion would call it childish."

"Mrs. M'Lean's supper would *not* be childish," added Wanda with unusual cheerfulness. "She makes the loveliest pies, and I expect we should have haggis."

They were so busy speculating on what Mrs. M'Lean's supper would consist of that they quite forgot to ask what had taken Mogs and Sara away.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SECRET

MRS. LYSDEN'S place was empty at dinner-time.

Messengers were sent, searchers went to find her, but she was not to be found. But Jessie returned from the nursery to say that the two young ladies, Miss Gordon and Miss Elcott, had come with a message, and Mrs. Lysden had gone at once.

Mrs. Hinford looked towards Sara with a little frown of vexation.

"Why did you not speak, Sara?" she asked sharply. "You knew we were sending to look for Mrs. Lysden. What was the message you took her?"

Sara stood up.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Hinford," she replied. "Mrs. Lysden *said* she might not be back to dinner, but she particularly asked us not to say where she had gone."

Mrs. Hinford became very pink, and looked across at Miss Dane, who raised her eyebrows.

It was an awkward situation, but Sara sat down and went on with her raisin pudding as much as to say "That's that, and you can't expect me to speak."

Of course there was a general whispering and talking round the table. Curious glances were bestowed on the "girls who knew." Mademoiselle seemed to have a great deal to say to Miss Alys, who looked worried.

And still no Mrs. Lysden made her appearance.

Sara and Mogs met after dinner to whisper a tale of fears. They dared not tell their chums, who mercifully kept out of their way; several of the other girls, less loyal though scarcely more curious, had attempted to cross-examine them, but they escaped.

"I don't like it a *bit*," said Sara emphatically. "To begin with, I can't stand the Indian, who looked as if he would find the greatest pleasure in the world in sticking a knife into any of us. And he and the doc must have got back ages ago to the Stone House."

"Perhaps Felix Brown is dead," said Mogs; "he might have been a bad relation or something of the kind, though I don't see why Mrs. L. should bother about him if he were. He evidently did not want to see her, and Mustog Ali just glared at her. I honestly don't think we ought to leave her, knowing where she is. But if she is in danger you and I couldn't put up much of a fight, especially if old Ali set Sultan on to us."

"Shall we go and see Alec and the minister?" asked Sara.

The girls had got into the way of calling Alec's father by his title rather than his name.

"We might suggest it to Mrs. Hinford," said Mogs, "but I don't know that we ought to break our word, even by telling Alec."

They had reached the front hall as they spoke, and as they did so the door opened and Mrs. Lysden came in.

The girls would have rushed to her in their relief and joy, but the expression on her face checked them.

"Oh," gasped Sara, "I am thankful. We were so frightened, Mrs. Lysden, and we did not know what to do because of our promise."

The governess leaned forward and kissed the anxious faces. Pale though she was, there was a strangely exalted expression in her eyes which told of some victory for which she thanked God.

"I am going to speak to Mrs. Hinford first," she said quietly, "but will you both go to my room and wait for me? You—I—I owe you both so much that I feel you have the right to be told the truth. I will explain to Miss Dane."

The faintest little smile flickered over her lips as she opened the door of the headmistress's room.

It was terribly exciting to sit there in the tiny bed-sitting-room belonging to this friend of theirs. And oh, what a long talk she seemed to be having with Mrs. Hinford.

“ I have an idea,” whispered Sara, “ that she will have to go. Every one has their knife into the darling—I mean the govs. I suppose because she gangs her own gait and won’t join their little clique. Sometimes I think Miss Alys has a *penchant* for her, but it has been on the wane? Mademoiselle is a fire-brand and not a bit truthful if she has a grouse against any one.”

“ Here comes Mrs. Lysden,” said Mogs, “ and now we shall know.”

She stood up as the mistress came into the room.

“ My dears,” she said, then looked at the clock.

“ I have half an hour,” she went on, “ then I must first pack and then go and see my darling wee boy.”

She drew in her breath quickly.

“ You are *not* going to leave ? ” asked Sara passionately.

But Mogs came nearer to the elder woman’s side.

“ Is it going to hurt to tell us the story ? ” she questioned.

Mrs. Lysden smiled.

“ My dear Mogs,” she whispered, then she shook her head. “ No,” she replied, “ it—won’t hurt. It is just wonderful. I am the happiest—almost the happiest—woman in the wide world. I am going to leave. Yes, and at first Mrs. Hinford was angry. She had every right to be angry. I am afraid there is much I had no right to do. I have told her how

sorry I am, and she has forgiven me. She is a very noble woman."

She went to the window and looked out. Perhaps she was rallying her self-control, for all agitation had gone from her voice as she spoke again.

"I have to tell you," she said, "that I am not a widow at all. My husband, Malcolm Lysden, is at present a convict in Dartmoor Jail; he has been there for six months. He is serving a term of five years for forgery and violence. There is no need to give you girls particulars of the crime. It is enough to tell you he is an innocent man, condemned by a miscarriage of justice.

"His brother, Barry Lysden—after whom our Barry was named—was guilty of the crime, urged and persuaded to it by the girl he loved, and who afterwards married a richer man. Barry is older than my husband and is wealthy now. Six months ago he was poor. The money that came to him should have been my husband's.

"It seemed, when my husband entered that sad and tragic prison on the lonely moors of Devonshire, that if ever he lived to come out he would be faced by poverty and shame. Yet he was innocent.

"So I resolved to clear his name. I prayed, and in praying made my vow to save him if God would be my guide.

"I learned—not by coincidence or by chance, but *because I had prayed*—that my brother-in-law



"I resolved to clear his name."

and his devoted Indian servant, with the dog he loved as one might love a child, had come to Culloch.

"I also read in the paper of how a famous house was being sold to a famous schoolmistress.

"I went to Mrs. Hinford. I had good credentials, for I had been to college before my marriage—I had even taught for a year in a well-known college.

"I got the post—and I visited Barry.

"He was furious to find I knew the truth, but when he found I had no proof he laughed at me.

"I went again. I think I touched or at least disturbed his conscience. He saw Barry, and the child did what I could never have done. He was in a softened and conscience-stricken frame of mind on the occasion of my third visit.

"But Mustog Ali was furious, he thought I was making his master ill. He had already had some serious attacks of illness. He—threatened me as you saw.

"Then to-day I saw Barry. He is *very* ill, but he told me he was ready to write and sign a confession. He did it. He told me all the story and the strategy by which he had made my husband appear guilty. I have the paper signed. I am going *now* to Devonshire, to my dear husband. He will be free.

"The doctor came whilst I was still at Stone House. He told me Barry was terribly ill. He is arranging to have him taken by ambulance to a nursing home in Dorloch, where he will be well nursed.

"I have promised Barry that Malcolm shall come back with me, and tell him of his forgiveness.

"I spoke of his—Barry's—danger. He says

there is none, that he has absolute confidence in Mustog Ali to outwit any police. He smiled as he spoke. I think he has a secret. But nothing matters. I have no fear. I saw Mustog waiting for the doctor. He looked as if he hated me, but his hatred will not touch me now."

"Oh," cried Sara, "how wonderful! Dear, dear Mrs. Lysden, how wonderful!"

Mogs did not speak, she only looked, but it was the sort of look which spoke more eloquently than words.

"We must go now," was all Mogs *said*; "you'll want to pack. Shall I bring Barry presently?"

"Yes," smiled the other, "bring Barry, in a quarter of an hour's time. I am going to leave him here whilst I am gone. Our plans all have to be made. Mrs. Hinford has been a friend indeed. She has told me Barry may stay as long as I wish. She was so kind when she heard all my story, so sympathetic. She is not telling any one. People may say what they like about my leaving. My friends know the truth."

Sara and Mogs slipped off to the nursery, where Barry was playing with his bricks.

"Mrs. Lysden was called to see some one who is ill," Sara told Kirstie, and then went off loyally to the schoolroom whilst Mogs played with the small friendly boy who talked "secrets" to this good chum.

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Mogs took him to say good-bye, and his mother taught him to say "au 'voir."

"Only au revoir, darling," repeated Mrs. Lysden, kissing him once again. "Muvver will soon be back and bring Barry the loveliest present. A *secret* present."

The little boy clapped his hands.

A *secret* present meant such a very special birthday gift.

"And Mogs will take care of my Barry till Muvver comes," added Mrs. Lysden. "We love Mogs, don't we, Barry?"

Barry nodded.

"Yes," he agreed, "*and* secret presents. Make haste quick, Muvver, and come back to Barry. He will be at the nurselly window looking for you."

Mrs. Lysden picked up her bag. She looked so young, so happy, yet there were tears in her eyes as she glanced back from the door to where Mogs stood with her arm round Barry.

"I almost wish I was taking him with me, Mogs," she said in a whisper, "but it would mean delay, and I—I feel no aeroplane or express train can get me to Dartmoor soon enough."

Mogs beamed.

"And then you'll bring *him* home to Barry," she said. "How lovely!"

She wondered whether they would go to the Stone House, and what would happen to the man

she had seen for those few minutes on the veranda at Stone House.

It seemed a pity that *any* one should suffer, and yet, after all, the man who had sinned must at last pay the penalty—unless Mustog Ali came to the rescue.

But somehow Mogs did not like to think of Mustog Ali, with his cruel eyes.

CHAPTER XX

HALLOWE'EN

THERE were many speculations at Culloch House as to why Mrs. Lysden had left in such haste.

Mrs. Hinford kept her word to the letter, and gave no clue.

"She has not left because of any fault, nor is there any blame attached to her," she told both the staff and elder girls.

"She has my fullest sympathy and good wishes. I have promised to take care of Barry till she comes for him. In her absence I shall ask the help of Professor Maguire from Dorloch, and Miss Alys will help with the juniors."

"So that's that," said Wanda; "we can read between the lines, though, in spite of Sara and Mogs looking so wise. But the concerns of Widow Lysden don't interest me greatly. What I want to know is whether we of the Fifth Form are going to contribute a playlet or charade to the Christmas programme, or——"

"Bide a wee," urged Sara. "You forget Mrs.

M'Lean's invitation. After all, we are not asking Mademoiselle. She's too sarcastic over Mrs. Lysden. Miss Alys is quite game for a bit of fun, so we are going to a Hallowe'en party with her."

"I don't believe in any charms," said Wanda, "but I love Scotch shortbread, so I'll come. What about Mary Ann's Penny? She is looking floppy since Gilda and Co. left, but she seems grateful for little attentions, and every bit of swank has left her."

"Of course, Pernillia by all means," laughed Sara, "and I'm glad you suggested her, Wanda. Nice kid."

"Kid!" stormed Wanda, then grew pensive. "Alec must come," she said, "he is a bright boy. Peter and Paul were trying to intrigue him on Monday, but he did not rise. They say Mrs. Mingleton lost three thousand pounds' worth of jewellery, and not a ghost of a gipsy has been seen since. I sometimes wonder if Penny learned anything about their crooked ways. She was hand and glove with them at one time, and showed me rather a saucy gipsy outfit they gave her."

"Penny'll have fits if you mention gipsies to her now," said Mogs gruffly from her corner, "but she'll be all right for the Hallowe'en show. She told me about it."

Penny had returned to the daily routine of lessons, but did not look well, and was never pressed.

Winter seemed inclined to set in early. There

had been one or two slight snowfalls and some sharp frosts.

The girls were glad to forsake the playing-fields, except for hockey and netball, and gather round the great open hearths where truly old-world fires of peat and wood were kept blazing.

Fancy dresses claimed a first place in the programme, and rehearsals took place for the various entertainments which were to start in the second week of December.

The invited guests arrived early at Mrs. M'Lean's for the Hallowe'en party. Supper was a grand meal; everything the heart of a schoolgirl could desire was there, and how they ate! Then Mrs. M'Lean had to refresh her memory and tell the tales of days when the Stuarts fought to regain their crown and "bluidy Claverssee" hunted gallant Covenanters from cave and cranny to die for what they believed to be God's will in worship.

The most thrilling story told of how Jamie Gillespie, come to bid his parents farewell before he fled to safety, was warned that the soldiers were near the farm. Then down on a bier quickly fashioned was Jamie laid with all attendant rites observed, and there he lay till the captain, forgetting the danger of leaving a door ajar, saw the "braw corpse" o' the laddie rise up and stride out through the door and along the passage heedless of Claversee's "lambs" who stood around.

“And not a hand laid out to take him, which is a true tale,” declared the farmer’s wife. “’Tis said that sae great fear cam’ on the sodgers that seven of them took the Covenant next Sabbath, and not a hair o’ the heid o’ one o’ Jamie’s friends was touched. It was talked of far and near for mony a day o’ Jamie’s ghaist dressed in its grave clothes walkin’ across the yardie and up’ the glen. They say Claversee his nainsel never cam’ near Culloch again, and sae in time, back cam’ Jamie an’ mairrit his ain true love, livin’ happy a’ the days o’ his life.”

After the tale-telling came games and future reading, Wanda succeeded in biting the most apples out of the huge tub of water in which they were set afloat, and Mary Ann got wettest in pursuing them.

Then away they all went blindfold into the “kale” yardie to pull their kales. Sara was successful in pulling up the “tallest and straightest,” and was promised a fine figure of a man for husband.

Miss Alys entered into the fun of the thing with the greatest enthusiasm, but, in groping to put her hands in the “truth telling” saucer of water, found it empty and dry, and was cheerfully told she was fated to be an old maid!

“Too bonny for that ava!” decided Mrs. M’Lean. “Ye’ll be reading the glass, lassie, for fairer fortune.”

Reading the glass was best of all. The egg was duly cracked on the edge of the tumbler filled with

water, and the white carefully let down into the glass. The "reader's" hand was placed over the tumbler, and when withdrawn, the fanciful shapes taken by the white of egg told the future.

"Wedding bells," showed Miss Alys that the saucer game was false. "Curling waves" promised Sara a sailor sweetheart. Wanda was to mate with a farmer, since Mrs. M'Lean saw ploughed fields and barns, whilst Gaby was given a parson, since her egg showed the spire of a church.

It was time to go home at last, and away they tramped, finding the moonlight walk not the least amusing part of the entertainment.

As they went up the lane they heard the hoot-toot of a motor car, and fled just in time to the ditch as one of the Castle cars flashed by.

Sara caught at Gaby's hand.

"*Did* you see who was sitting by Peter?" she asked. "Why, it was *Gilda*. Did you ever know such colossal cheek? I wonder what Topsy will say to that?"

But what Mrs. Hinford *did* think did not reach the pupils' ears.

Mrs. Lysden had sent Mogs a note from Barnstaple saying she and her husband were staying there for a week or so, as he was ill; short though the letter was it radiated happiness and hope.

"Things are looking up," remarked Sara, as she "sat in council" amongst her chums, "though, I



The white of egg told the future.

am afraid, fishing expeditions and the like are over for the present. We shall have to work at our charade and—er—become industrious.”

They did not see quite as much of Alec now. He was laid up with a bad chill and 'flu, so his chums were not allowed to visit him. Lessons went on

vigorously; some of the girls were working for scholarships, and amongst them was Mary Ann.

Penny still looked heavy-eyed and pale, flushing painfully if ever the gipsies were mentioned.

There was no lingering, in haunted glens, or nutting in Stone House Woods. No news had reached the girls as to what had become of the—still to them—mysterious Felix Brown, and neither Mogs nor Sara knew if he had returned home from hospital.

Not a sign had they seen of Mustog Ali!

Brisk walks were taken over the moors, and the girls rather enjoyed these, especially those lucky enough to be in Miss Alys's detachment.

"I'm afraid," the latter was saying, as she and the girls tramped back from a rather longer expedition, "that the fog is going to play a nasty trick on us. Hurry along, girls, we must race the mist."

But Miss Alys knew as little about November fogs on these moors as did her pupils, and though they hurried, half running, half walking, and not wasting breath on talk, they were fairly caught, whether near home or not they had little chance to know.

It was no use moaning, no use to talk of the danger they were in. They all knew it and faced it pluckily.

Mary Ann may have remembered the story of a certain moorland bull, and Wanda certainly thought

of treacherous bogs, but they did not mention such nerve-racking knowledge.

"Keep together," urged Miss Alys, her voice sounding muffled and hoarse; "hold on to each other if possible, and every now and then we'll have a roll-call. You girls are always thirsting for adventure—you have it now!"

"Of course we are—*enjoying* it," fibbed Sara gallantly. "We can be anything but Culloch House girls. Jacobites or Covenanters, gipsies——" then she checked. Of course she had forgotten they had Penny with them.

Slowly, searching every step, using their flash-lights, which proved to be some help at least in showing them the path, they crept on. The trouble was that they *kept* going on and finding nothing but heather and rocks to border the narrow track.

Twice panic threatened when the dim outline of cow or sheep loomed near, but the poor beasts were far more scared by the hoarse "whoop" which greeted them than the human wanderers themselves.

And those girls behaved splendidly. Miss Alys croaked out her admiration as she and Sara led the way.

But as is so often the way, praise had hardly been bestowed than the test to courage came.

Out of the darkness ahead rose a shrill scream of terror, followed by a dull thud as of some heavy weight crashing to the ground.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ACCIDENT

"STEADY," urged Miss Alys, and Mary Ann flung a protecting arm round Penny who, she guessed, was coming to the end of her tether.

The party had halted on the track, but now moved back on to the heather whilst Miss Alys and Sara went forward alone.

Then a light pierced the mist, and gave a clue.

"That's a headlight from a car," muttered Miss Alys; "there's been an accident. Car overturned. I thought so."

The light had already gone out, but the gleam of a powerful torch helped them to locate the car.

The other girls, seeing the flash of light, had followed, and they all stood now, fearfully wondering what had happened to those within.

Then another scream, and the figure of a man loomed up out of the wreckage.

Miss Alys focused the light on him. It was Peter Mingleton. This was no moment to remember "feud," and Miss Alys went forward at once.

The young man was dazed, and had a long cut on the back of his left hand, but he had pluck enough

to rally. At first he did not recognize his rescuers, and when he did, his nervous awkwardness touched Miss Alys with pity.

"Don't worry," she said in her downright way, "we are here to help you all we can. Come, that hand is bleeding badly. I'll tie it up, and you shall tell me who is with you in the car?"

"Paul—and Gilda," said Peter huskily. "It's—awfully good of you. . . . We've been—such bounders. I . . ."

"Sit down and don't talk," said Miss Alys kindly. "The fog is going to lift, I believe. The wind is rising. Pray God it may help us to see what has happened."

Then she went back to her girls.

Penny was obviously no use, and Mary Ann, to her great distress, was detailed off to look after her.

Then, with fear in their hearts, the others went back to the wrecked car.

A third scream from the prisoned Gilda told them at least that she was alive, and it was not long before the searchers located her.

After all, her plight was not very serious. The roof of the car had fallen slantwise, and Gilda was pinned underneath by her clothes and left leg.

She gave way to screaming hysterics as she saw the shadowy figures gathered round. But Wanda, for one, had less sympathy than she might have shown.

"Your lungs are (ill right anyhow, Gilda," she snapped. And the shock of finding out who her rescuers were actually silenced Gilda for a few moments.

But as the girls, banded bravely together, succeeded in raising the heavy roof, she gave way to further lamentations.

"My leg is broken," she sobbed. "I know it is. Oh, oh, oh! Wanda, I hate you. You're dragging me on purpose. You're just showing your spite. I . . ."

"They can't hold up that weight another tick," shouted Wanda; "if you *don't* scramble out, it will fall and kill you."

That was enough, and forgetful of the "broken leg," which was merely numbed and bruised, Miss Gilda scrambled out.

"I shall die, I know I shall," she moaned; "and it was all Paul's fault. He would race—at least, go fast in spite of the fog, and—and a sheep got in front. . . . If he'd been careful he could . . ."

"Shut up," growled Wanda. "Here, get on the bank. Your friend is there. Which one? Peter. Here, Peter, look after her. She's not really hurt."

"Not really hurt!" screamed Gilda; but Peter stretched out and caught her arm.

"Be quiet," he muttered, "they've found—Paul. . . . He's badly hurt. That topping woman came back for brandy. . . . I had some. I . . ."



"Not really hurt!" screamed Gilda.

"You might get me some then," moaned Gilda.
"I'm much more hurt than Paul, and it was his own fault. I . . ."

The mist was clearing. Big boulders, wind-swept trees loomed mysteriously around.

They could see the water-drenched blades of

grass and heather, the wrecked car, the group of girls.

Peter stood up.

"Is he . . ." he stammered, "is he . . ."

Miss Alys came back ; she was bareheaded and had taken off her coat. •

"He is alive," she said kindly, "but we dare not move him. Sara and Mogs are going down to the village for help. After they have sent the doctor and others along, they will go to the Castle. We are doing all we can. Don't come at present."

She rested her hand very kindly on the lad's shoulder as he covered his face, groaning out words of gratitude and prayer.

Even Gilda was silent for a few moments.

Sara and Mogs were already off. Miss Alys had not liked letting them go, but what could she do ? Paul Mingleton's life might depend on it.

The mists were clearing and they could see—and recognize—the track. After all, they were not too far from the village.

Neither of the girls spoke, just trotted along at a steady, swinging pace.

Sara's liking for 'Oliver Cromwell had deepened into genuine affection. They two and Gaby promised to mock the proverb about three being ill company.

But Gaby had remained behind now, having superior knowledge of first aid, and therefore claimed by Miss Alys.

As they ran down the familiar hill the two girls were lucky in meeting the minister, and he at once promised to find Dr. M'Gregor and take him with others to the help of those in need.

"We're going on to the Castle," called back Sara; "the Mingletons will be sure to send their big car. It may overtake you."

It seemed ages before the butler came, slow and stately, to answer the bell.

At sight of those wet and draggled figures wearing the familiar school cap, he made to shut the door, but Sara was too quick for him and stepped inside.

"Hurry up," she urged. "Where's Mr. Mingleton? There's been an accident. Hurry."

It was Mrs. Mingleton who, from the doorway of a room opposite, called an indignant order.

"Culloch House girls, I see," she said in those high-pitched tones. "No; you can go elsewhere for any assistance. I . . ."

Mogs was less pitying than Sara.

"It's your sons' car which is smashed up on the moor," said she. "We've sent along the minister and doctor, but Paul is badly injured . . . we don't know *how* badly. Peter is all right."

Mrs. Mingleton prided herself on her iron nerve, but it failed her now.

Her life was wrapped up in those twin boys of hers, and if she *had* a favourite it was Paul.

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She reeled back now, and the butler went forward, his face full of concern.

"Call your master," she said faintly; but the man shook his head.

"The master has taken Evans to Dorloch, madam," he replied, "but may be back any moment now."

Poor woman! The girls stood, forgetting those first cruel words, eager to help.

"It's not far," said Mogs gruffly. "One of us could stay and direct the chauffeur, and the other could show you the way, if you like."

"Thank you."

Mrs. Mingleton's voice sounded strained and despairing.

"Thank you, dears. And—you are Culloch House girls. . . ; Give me my cape, Henry, and . . ."

"Brandy," hinted Mogs, "and perhaps a cushion or so—and bandages. I can carry anything."

They were quickly brought. Servants came hurrying. Mrs. Mingleton, braver now, but tense with fear, followed Mogs readily.

It was a silent walk at first, then the elder woman spoke.

"Who is there?" she asked, and on hearing gave a deep sigh.

"All—from Culloch House," she whispered. "And—Peter—Gilda. . . ."

"Peter's hand is cut, and he's shaken up," said

Mogs, "but he seems all right. Gilda is squealing and yelling, but she's not badly hurt at all."

Then behind them came the hooting of a motor horn, and Mr. Mingleton was the next moment beside his wife.

The two girls drew back. •

"We can't do any good now," said Sara, as Mr. Mingleton held open the door. "We'll go back to the school. Topsy will be fussing. Can we phone any one?"

Mr. Mingleton nodded, gave the address of a specialist in Edinburgh, and jumped back beside his wife.

Mrs. Hinford received her two pupils with deep thankfulness.

If the fog had not lifted, search parties had been organized and would have started.

Sara told the story briefly and well, and the two girls went upstairs together.

"Odd, isn't it?" said Sara, "that Culloch House girls of all others should 'pick up the pieces.' Anyhow, I hope Paul isn't too bad. As for Gilda."

Mogs grinned.

"*Being* Gilda," she retorted, "I don't see how she could help herself."

• But all were not as charitable as Mogs.

Mr. Mingleton called at Culloch House late that evening to try—vainly—to thank those timely helpers.

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Paul was very seriously hurt, and an operation had had to be performed, but nurses and doctors were satisfied, and Mr. Mingleton, in broken tones, added that he and his wife had been told they would be owing their boy's life to those who had so well performed their first aid and been instrumental in getting him home so soon.

"You will understand," Mr. Mingleton went on, "*how* we feel. Our conduct has been far less than neighbourly. We defied your authority, Mrs. Hinford, in an inexcusable way, and championed—excuse my strong language—a pair of worthless girls. Gilda has proved herself an utterly selfish, ungrateful young woman. She violently blamed my poor boy for the accident. Threatened us with the anger of her parents, and left the house, fortunately, before my wife felt equal to a counter attack. We shall, I hope, never see or hear from her or her friend again. My wife asks that she may be forgiven, and later try to show her gratitude."

Mrs. Hinford's response was warm in sympathy and kindness.

"We all make mistakes," she declared, "and we must forget the past excepting for the lessons we can all learn."

Mr. Mingleton sent messages to his son's rescuers, but was obviously thankful to be spared an interview.

"And so exit Gilda," murmured Sara, as she and Gaby sat together discussing the events of the day.

"After all, in spite of thrills, things seem to be going very cheerily, eh? Why so solemn, my Gabrielle?"

Gaby shook her head. . . .

"I don't *quite* know," she confessed; "but when I went to say good-night to Barry that nurse of his, Kirstie, seemed rather upset. She declares that some one was hiding amongst the bushes as she came in with the kiddie from their walk. And Barry would keep talking of the dark, dark man. It can't be Mustog Ali. We don't seem to have heard or seen anything of him and Mr. Brown, and I don't particularly wish to."

Sara caught back her breath in a quick little gasp.

Was it possible Mustog Ali was still at the Stone House, even if his master were away? And if so, was it Barry who interested him, or had he come watching for Barry's mother, not knowing the latter was away?

"I shall tell Mogs," decided Sara, "and we will keep a sharp look out. If I see so much as a glimpse of that turban I shall tell Topsy!"

CHAPTER XXII

STOLEN

ALEC was well enough next day to come up to the school to tea with his friends.

It was Sara's birthday this time, though I think that special tea-party was given more in honour of the fog-bound party. Mrs. Mingleton had been over, and the interview had been trying. All the masterfulness had vanished from Paul's mother's manner as she kissed and thanked each of those she insisted on calling heroines.

Paul was still very ill, so there could be no entertaining such as his mother longed to give in eager anxiety to make reparation.

She told Mrs. Hinford that she dared not begin to talk about Gilda. She also added that Retta's parents had before-time written most rudely to her, saying their daughter would not be allowed either to communicate with her or her friend Gilda Perkins.

"I offer no excuse," the penitent woman owned, "and I can never express my gratitude. But you will know if ever I can be of service in any way to

you⁶ or any of your brave girls, I shall be truly thankful."

Alec was most interested. He looked rather thin and big-eyed after his illness, and inclined to sigh over being "fussed." But the girls soon laughed him out of that, and Gaby grew eloquent in coaxing him to take part in their Christmas charade. Only Mogs looked on pityingly. She could not imagine those boisterous brothers of hers joining in play-acting with a crowd of girls.

But Alec, the soul of good nature and chivalry, yielded to the claim of comradeship, and was forth-with plunged into the maelstrom of business.

Sara and Mogs got hold of him at last, and carried him off to a deep alcove in the gallery.

Mogs wanted to know all about the Stone House, and whether Felix Brown, his Indian, and his dog were there.

Alec shook his head.

"Odd," he replied, "your asking. Dr. M'Gregor was telling us that Felix Brown is desperately ill in a nursing home, and that the Indian comes—or rather *came*—every day to inquire, but he has not been for a couple of days, and Mr. Brown is rather worried. What about it? I rather think I shall nip over the wall and find out.

"Whatever Mustog's failings he was devoted to the mysterious Mr. Brown, whom Dr. M'Gregor is quite interested over. *He agrees with us that there

is a mystery, and yesterday when his heart was 'so bad he kept asking for ' Malcolm.' No one, of course, knows who Malcolm is, so he can't be satisfied."

Sara looked at Mogs. This news added to the tangle of events. If Mustog Ali were ill—or unfaithful—what was going to happen?

"I should like to come with you," said Sara to Alec, "but I don't think we ought to. Mrs. Hinford has had so many scares this term we are all out to give her a really peaceful ending."

It was past seven o'clock, before Alec left, and the supper bell rang soon after.

Mary Ann had been rather an absentee lately from the ranks of her comrades. Penny did not quite fit in with the fun makers, and Mrs. Hinford had written to her mother about the advisability of sending her home.

"I ought to tell Topsy—or Mary Ann," Mogs was saying as she and Sara went upstairs, and then Penny was forgotten at sight of Kirstie standing there on the landing wringing her hands in despair.

Both girls felt their pulses bound. In a moment their thoughts flew in the same direction, and yet in their fear they asked a futile question.

"Is Barry ill?"

The nurse shook her head.

"Not ill, misses," she sobbed, "he's gone. Only five minutes was I awa fetching up my bit supper from the kitchen. Only a minute did I stay

to talk a word to Jessie, and when I came back, eh! when I came back," her voice rose shrill, "the bonnie wee lad had gone—gone—and, nae blink or sign of him left."

"Gone!" echoed Sara. "Kirstie, what nonsense. He's hiding. You know what a bairn he is. He must have woken up and is playing a game with you. He can't be lost."

They were hurrying back with the sobbing woman. At first their minds were more or less blank, but subconsciously Mogs began to realize she had feared this ever since she heard Barry talk of the dark, dark man hiding in the bushes.

Sara, whatever her real thoughts, was obstinate in declaring Barry must be having a game with them.

She sent Kirstie off down to Mrs. Hinford whilst she and Mogs began their search.

Barry's clothes lay neatly piled where Nurse Kirstie had folded them not so long ago. The crib blankets and coverlet were tossed back, but showed no signs of a struggle.

The girls called and searched, but it had been patent from the first Barry was not in either of his nurseries.

"Mrs. Lysden's room," said Sara briefly, and they went together.

Mogs's silence, her pale, tragic face, somehow irritated the other girl.

"He's *sure* to be in the house," she said im-

patiently. "Don't look as if you thought he 'nad been carried off by aeroplane or—oh! I know what you're thinking, but it is ridic! There are crowds of people about. Barry has trotted off to cook, or one of the gobs or girls. Every one spoils him, except Mademoiselle and possibly the Dane. Why don't you agree, Mogs, instead of looking so frozen?"

Mogs wriggled.

"Not exactly frozen," she pleaded, "but—sort of stunned. You see, his mother specially asked me to have an 'eye on him. We know the story, and oh! what *is* the use of looking behind curtains and under beds when *you* know, and *I* know he has been kidnapped by Mustog Ali."

Sara heard the voicing of her fears, and it made her shiver.

Kirstie and Miss Alys were coming upstairs, with Meriel Sallerton behind them.

Barry was a favourite of Meriel's, as he was with every one, and she cried out to know if the child had been found.

"He can't be far," she added impatiently, "but the poor wee thing will get his death of cold. Kirstie says he was just in his pyjamas."

"You can look," replied Sara; "*we* can't find him. And please, we want to go down to Mrs. Hinford."

The other searchers let them go. Kirstie, looking after them, shook her head.

"Those are the two young ladies the mistress confided in," she said; "they knew mair of her secrets than ony; and secrets there were, ye ken. Barry wad talk of the black man and the dog, and the nice man wi' hair on his face. There was something secret aboot it a', and it's ma nainsel ought to hae been tauld, and niver for a moment wad I hae left the puir laddie."

And she flung her apron over her head, sobbing afresh.

Meantime Mogs and Sara were telling Mrs. Hinford their fears.

She listened carefully and looked terribly worried.

"If I had fully understood I would not have taken the responsibility," she murmured; "it was all so sudden and hardly fair. This is too distressing, coming in a term of so many trying experiences. I must phone the police if Barry is not in the house."

"Could you phone Dr. M'Gregor?" pleaded Sara, "and ask the name and number of the nursing home in Dorloch where Barry's uncle was taken. Perhaps Mr. Lysden's nurse would be able to find out if the Indian has called at the home. He had not been near for two or three days, and Mr. Lysden was worrying about it. We *might* hear news."

"My dear," sighed Mrs. Hinford, "do you really suppose the invalid uncle or the native could have anything to do with this?"

Mogs and Sara did not reply. They just dared

not think, but Mrs. Hinford went to the phone and her face grew very grave as she listened.

The matron of the home said she was glad inquiries were being made, as Mr. Felix Brown was a dying man, and, though the end might not come immediately, they were most anxious for relatives to be notified. As to the Indian, he had not been near the home for two or three days till that very afternoon, when he had called to inquire and gone up to see his master, who was then unconscious. He had left the home without speaking !

Sara was able to supply the address at Barnstable where Mrs. Lysden and her husband were staying—and that was all.

As Mrs. Hinford hung up the receiver her hand was trembling.

The mother would be coming, perhaps tomorrow, to claim her child, and he would not be there.

The servants had been spoken to about seeing any stranger in the school, but no trace had been found, and both outer doors were locked, the windows all closed, shutters were in place.

"The secret passage," suggested Sara ; "has it been blocked up ?"

Miss Alys, who was present, flushed. She had *meant* to see about it, but Paul Mingleton's accident and all the excitement had put it out of her head.

Lantern in hand she led the little procession now down to the cellars. Holding the light high, the yellow flare showed the wall, showed the gaping hole.

Some one had found it possible to open the sliding door from the inside, and had thus entered the house, not troubling to close or disguise the fact of a secret visit. Had other proof been needed there were traces of the Indian's sandals in the dust.

It was proven fact now, instead of vague suspicion, that Mustog Ali had carried off the little child of a woman he hated as one he considered answerable for the sickness of his master.

And it had not been at that master's request to see the boy. Evidently the Indian had not taken the little Barry to see his uncle. The fact that he had carried him off dressed only in his pyjamas, out into the chill of a November evening, was ominous.

"We must notify the police *at once*," said Mrs. Hinford, "and I should think the first thing they ought to do would be to go to the Stone House. Mustog Ali would probably take the little fellow there. He will not go far whilst his master is alive. It is—most terrible, most heart-breaking."

"Can't *we* go to the Stone House?" pleaded Sara. "We know something about it, you see? Do let us go."

But the headmistress shook her head.

"I feel," she declared, "that I shall be afraid to trust any of you out of my sight till that Indian

is found. I am truly *thankful* the gipsies at least have left the neighbourhood."

She did not notice the start Mogs gave as she spoke, or the way the girl clenched her hands.

But 'Oliver Cromwell was not given to impulsive speech, and whatever thought had passed through her mind she did not tell it to the others.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SEARCH

IN due course, and with wonderfully little delay, the Dorloch police arrived.

Mrs. Hinford, entrusted with another woman's secret *and* another woman's child, found it difficult to tell the story, but at least she was able to tell enough to put the detective on the track of the man who for some reason had taken off little Barry.

The Stone House was, of course, the first objective, and Miss Alys was allowed to join the professional searchers since she would need to take the child.

It was getting late now, and Miss Dane had seen to it that the rest of the girls went off to bed whether or no. Sara and Mogs were allowed to wait till the return of Miss Alys, and Gaby managed to evade the lynx-eyed Miss Barker and join them.

It seemed ages before the bell sounded, and a few minutes later Miss Alys entered the room where she was so anxiously awaited.

She looked so white and sad that a terrible fear hammered at Mogs's heart, but Miss Alys reassured them on one point at least.

“No trace of Barry whatever,” she said, “but evidently the Indian has been living in the house up till to-day. There are the remains of quite freshly cooked curry, and the ashes of the fire are barely cold.

“The police are puzzled, and one thing surprised us all after what Mogs and Sara had told us about the favourite dog, for the police found a large hound answering to their description. It was dead, poor creature, and had been killed by a dagger thrust. That too had not been dead many hours.

“The detective who knows something of Indians asked us to return afterwards to the nearest telephone office. It appears that the gentleman known as Mr. Felix Brown is dead.”

Miss Alys paused. The faces of all in the room were very grave, very—afraid.

“And the detective?” said Mrs. Hinford.

Miss Alys sighed.

“He seems to fear no one will ever see the Indian—or the child—again,” she replied. “He says everything points to revenge against the child’s parents, and he states, very grimly, that Indians are thorough in their methods. He is sure the dog would not have been killed if Mustog Ali had meant to return. He thinks it just possible he may have had some communication. That is all.”

“And everything is being done?” asked Mrs. Hinford feverishly. “Posts must be watched, a description of this Mustog Ali given. He cannot

varnish with a four-year-old child into the blue. Little Barry is not a baby, and he is very intelligent. You do not think . . . do not suppose . . .”

She faltered, and Sara turned and clung to Mogs.

Surely, surely Mustog Ali could not have meditated killing the child. If so he would have done the deed here instead of taking him away.

There was nothing more, it seemed, to be done that evening . . . nothing more to say.

To-morrow, Mrs. Lysden would be here, and she might be able to throw more light on the subject.

Sara parted from Mogs at the door of their bedroom. She would have broken rules and crept in for a further talk, but Mogs was unresponsive.

“There’s nothing to do, nothing to say,” she said, more Oliver Cromwell in her manner than ever. “Go to sleep, Sara, and wake up fresh. Mrs. Lysden will be here to-morrow, and will want you tremendously. You must tell her to—hope.”

Sara frowned.

“You are more likely to cheer her up than I am,” she retorted, “and if you have any sort of hope you’re more of an optimist than I am. There! I didn’t mean to be cross, but I simply can’t bear to think of Barry in that awful man’s clutches. He must be absolutely heartless to kill the dog he loved. No, I won’t go on talking, Oliver, but all I can say is I wish I had your placid nature. I can’t sleep under the circs, and you will.”

Mogs grinned.

"I generally do what I set out to do," she retorted, "or at least I don't believe at the start that I'm going to fail. Good-night, Sara. You *are* a pal."

And Sara, going along to her own room, wondered what exactly was *odd* about the speaker's sudden outburst of affection. She would have been still more surprised if she had followed Mogs into her room.

There had been a good deal of "general post" about several of the bedroom occupants this term.

At present Mogs, at special request of Penny's, was sleeping with her and Mary Ann, leaving Sara to rejoice in the society of Gaby and Wanda.

Mogs did not light her candle at once as she closed the door, but went over to where Mary Ann slept the heavy dreamless sleep of the fortunate owner of a calm nature and steady nerves.

Penny's voice, however, came trailing in a whisper to the last-comer.

"That you, Mogs?"

"Yes." Mogs came and sat on the side of the questioner's bed as she replied.

Penny sought for her hand and squeezed it hard.

"Dear old Mogs," she whispered, "you heard what they—they said, didn't you? That it was lucky the gipsies had gone. You believe they have gone, don't you?"

"No," said Mogs stolidly, "I don't. Now don't go waking Mary Ann up, Penny. You've got to be sensible, see? It's frightfully important. I'm going to confide in you, old bean, and you're going to be a real heroine. It won't be easy, because—well, never mind. I'll just ask you this and no more. Where's the gipsy dress those gipsies gave you?"

Penny began to tremble, but Mogs's firm hand-clasp seemed to reassure her, and with a great effort she rallied.

"In the bottom drawer, under my Sunday coat. Mary Ann has never seen it. I wish you would take it away, dear Mogs. Zillah Smith give it to me. She dressed me up once, but she only laughed at me, and said I had the wrong coloured hair and eyes for a gipsy. Then, when I asked her, she gave me the dress and said that perhaps one day I should come back and live with them. She said no true *Giorgian* was ever named Pernillia. Besides, I have the charm which gave me my rights. I asked what my rights were, and she said, 'the obedience of any gipsy tribesman or woman.' That's why, when I told them I was poor, they gave me money. I did not know it was stolen till—the corals. . . . They told me that there was a store of wealth in Gipsy-land. They promised if I came one midnight to a certain place on the moors that they would give me *all* gipsy rights, and that I should light the gipsy fires. I never dared go, though I wanted to."

"They never," said Mogs, crouching nearer, "told you or showed you the secret entrance to Gipsy-town?"

The other caught her breath, and her fingers tightened round those of Mogs.

"No," she whispered, "they told me they never would until I came to live with them. That is their greatest secret. The secret of hundreds and hundreds of years when the Smiths and Fosters and Lees came to the Border country. But they blindfolded me once and took me down. I saw one of the great caves, and saw them dancing. But I was too frightened to enjoy it. Why are you asking, Mogs? *You* don't want to go to find the gipsies. They have all left Culloch."

For answer Mogs bent over and kissed Penny's burning cheek.

"All I want to do is to find Barry," she replied. "I don't want to pry into gipsy secrets or accept gipsy gifts. Go to sleep, Penny; and there is only one little promise you must make. Don't tell any one of this talk, and if you miss your gipsy dress you will know who has taken it."

Penny's arms went round the other's neck.

"You are a darling," she said, "and I must keep my promise, because you are so utterly splendid in keeping yours."

But after Penny's quiet breathing told that she was really asleep, Mogs did a surprising thing.

Slipping out of bed she tiptoed to Penny's chest of drawers, opened the bottom one, and after quick searching took out a gay gipsy dress and handkerchief.

With great care she dressed herself, lighting her candle presently to study her face in the glass. She was sun-tanned enough, her hair was dark enough, just a touch here, a touch there with blackened cork and some dark-coloured wash, but no real make-up was needed beyond the dress. Then very stealthily Mogs crept from the room.

She had no hairbreadth escapes as she stole down the passage. No boards creaked under her foot. The wide shallow stairs were not given to creaking. She passed across the hall, then paused.

In their haste and agitation she was fairly certain Miss Alys and her party had left the secret door unfastened in the cellar. If only she could leave Culloch House in that way it would save any danger of being stopped. Never a thought of ghosts had Mogs Gordon for all her Celtic blood. She was very much Oliver Cromwell as she stole alone down that chill dark passage towards the ruined chapel in the wood. Vividly she remembered her last visit, and how she had seen Jacob Smith talking with Mustog Ali.

What had they been saying, planning together ? To Mogs the answer was clear enough.

Mustog Ali meant his revenge on Mrs. Lysden,

the woman he felt to be answerable for his beloved master's sickness and death, to be complete. Possibly he himself would be returning to India, or, at any rate, "vanishing" out of the picture, but the child—the handsome wee son of his enemies—should be handed over to those who would bring him up to a life of shame, dishonesty, and disgrace. He would be worse than dead, a vagabond gipsy wandering from place to place, country to country, with the hands of all against him. He would be at the mercy of gipsy tyrants, who would treat him harshly, cruelly. Oh, it would be a life far harder than any quick death, the death robbed of its fears by an innocent child.

Mogs, creeping out into the drear November night, had visioned all this, and told herself she dared not wait for the opportunity of a rescue to be lost.

Police would be talking, arguing, delaying, all bound up in the red-tape of their office, whilst Mother Judith, Jacob Smith, and others of that gipsy community might be carrying off a little child to some distant hiding-place.

Mogs stood up, looking about her, wishing, oh, how ardently, that she might have shared the adventure with Sara and Gaby. But that had been impossible. Sara was too fair, too thoroughly English and impulsive. She would have "given herself away" in two minutes. Gaby—the very



She stole down the passage.

thought of fat, jolly, blundering Gaby as a gipsy spy was laughable !

Mogs squared her shoulders. She was out to win, and she stiffened for the adventure, eager to start on her trail.

It was not as dark as she had expected. A misty

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rain was falling, a misty moon shone down out of a "wet"-looking sky. The trees, already shedding brown and sodden leaves, looked forlorn, like ragged travellers caught in a storm. There was a smell of wet earth in the mists that rose from the peat and moss.

Mogs noted all, saw the chapel, drear and desolate, a mute testimony of the passing years and the fate of poor humanity, and then out from the grey skies a star shone down, and Mogs smiled as she prayed. Prayed for strength and courage, prayed for guidance and blessing, and went forward up through the clustering trees with her chin up and a brave, steadfast light in her eyes.

Oliver Cromwell fought for England, thought Mogs, and he never looked back when he had made up his mind he was called to right a wrong.

And she, Margaret Gordon—just Mogs of the Loyal Heart—had prayed too, and saw her way clear to forget self and go forward to the rescue of a little lad who loved her. A little lad whose sad-eyed mother had put him in her charge.

CHAPTER XXIV

MOGS OF THE LOYAL HEART

IT was darker in Jacobites' Glen than it had been in the wood, but Mogs was not easily discouraged.

Carefully climbing over the rocks, groping her way amongst the sodden bracken and brambles, she came at length to the monstrous rock on which Jacobite Jennie had stood to cry her last shrill warning to comrades.

"She stuck it," thought Mogs, "and so shall I."

She was aware that fear knocked loudly for an entrance to her heart. She knew she could easily yield to the temptation to go racing back down the glen to the shelter of Culloch House. But Barry's helplessness, the dumb pleading of outstretched baby hands, led her on.

She was in the cave now where Jennie's lover had died with Jennie, sacrificed by Jennie, proud of his sweetheart's loyalty, so that in death they were not divided.

Mogs was no scatterbrain to come on a grim errand unprepared. She held her torch between her

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knees as she searched for the spring which would "open" her *sesame*.

"Barry! Barry!" she whispered, and then the long flight of stairs led down into darkness and the unknown.

For hundreds of years the secret of Gipsy-town had been kept. It was being disclosed and used now by a Scottish schoolgirl who had been told death sealed the lips of all intruders.

Not daring now to use her torch, Mogs crept down, very slowly, very carefully.

A long, long flight, a short passage-way, then more stairs till she reached her journey's end.

She stood in Gipsy-town, the most forlorn and desperate visitor who had ever yet entered a town.

The cave in which she stood was very dimly lighted. All she could see were the rocky walls of a natural cavern, a sandy floor, and various pots, pans, and broken earthenware strewn around. In front of her a natural arch led into another cave.

This must be one of the series of natural caves she had heard of as existing under Scottish and Yorkshire moors, but holding the secrets of more than one community, and seldom discovered.

To her keen ears came the sound of distant singing and laughter, so that she was satisfied at once on a point she had questioned.

The gipsies were still here.

She passed her hand through her curls and moved

forward. As she did so she fancied she heard the sound of a baby crying, and paused to listen.

It was the tired cry of a sick infant, not the protesting sobs of sturdy Barry.

But the next cave gave her more hope, for a fire burned in one corner, being stoked by a gipsy lad of about twelve years of age, whose business seemed to be the eking out of fuel.

Seated on an overturned tin opposite, a gipsy mother rocked the wailing baby to and fro, whilst a girl of fourteen or fifteen crouched near.

Mogs hesitated. The rest of the cave was strewn with what might broadly be called family goods, though very much the goods of a *gipsy* family. A donkey was tethered to a pole, the whole picture an interesting one, for, beyond, could be seen another archway leading to another cave from which came the sound of men's voices and laughter.

Mogs made up her mind more quickly than usual.

It was dangerous to be wandering around Gipsy-town unattached, and with no story believable enough to make excuse for her presence here.

Besides, Penny, whom she represented, was probably known to many of the inhabitants.

Praying that she might not meet Jacob or his mother, Mogs approached the fire.

As she did so she noticed the mother of the infant looked ready to drop, and lurched in her pacing to and fro as though already half asleep.

Mogs felt for the "charm" which Penny had given her as "part" of the gipsy paraphernalia she was so ready to do away with.

If this did not act she knew she was in serious danger from a lawless crowd upon whose privacy she had dared to intrude.

Yet she smiled as she held out the "disc" of the "hand," murmuring "*Pernillia*."

The woman gave a low exclamation, the boy sprang to his feet, the girl came near.

Mogs smiled at the latter and took a hazard.

"Zillah," said she.

The girl laughed and shook back her black curls.

"You are not Pernillia," she said.

"I am her friend, the friend of gipsies," replied Mogs. "Pernillia lent me her—her pledge. You will give me what I ask for—a place in your company. No questions asked. I am the daughter of your mother's sister. Huh! the child is sick."

And as she spoke she turned, smiling to the elder woman as she took the baby in her arms.

As she did so a bundle of coats placed near began to stir and a chubby hand was flung out.

Mogs's heart gave a great bound. Surely—it was Barry himself.

But she took no notice, rocking the gipsy baby and crooning a French lullaby, till, to her own surprise and the mother's, the little creature cuddled down in her arms and closed its eyes.

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The mother stood, arms akimbo, watching. Zillah and the boy also stood—watching.

Mogs could have screamed in her impatience to see *what* lay hidden under the coats, but at last the baby did fall asleep, and the mother gathered it again into her arms. But she still looked at Mogs, and there was gratitude in her big black eyes.

Presently she spoke, in a low monotonous voice.

"Mother Judith sits in the Council," she said; "we await a message. It is strange that you come so late to join us. If you wish Toni shall take you to the Council Chamber."

Mogs shook her head.

"No," she replied. "There are many plans being made in the Council. I am only one who is gipsy-favoured. I do not wish any one, not even Jacob or Mother Judith, to know of my presence here till I make my claim. The claim of the hand."

And she held up the "mascot."

The woman, tired from want of sleep, nodded. She was not attempting to question the will of one whom she knew very well was gipsy-favoured. One bearing a gipsy name and likely to become one of the tribe.

That was what Zara thought of it if she thought at all.

"Give me the *bambino*," said Mogs, hoping this was the right word, "whilst you sleep. I am not tired."

"You are good. A true Romany. It is right you should belong to us," said the woman, and handed back the baby.

Mogs curled herself up as far as possible in the darkest corner and sat crooning to the little sleeper. She was glad she had been successful in quietening the child and finding a friend. The boy lay back too, Zillah cuddled close to Mogs, and there they crouched whilst Mogs watched those screening coats and longed to have one peep beneath.

Then, with sudden pattering of feet and whispering of voices, came gipsies,—two of them. Mogs guessed they came from Jacobites' Glen, and her pulses pounded.

In spite of all her care she had left the opening to the stairs without closing the trap.

She waited now, tense, expectant, her pulses racing.

From the caves near she heard the clamour and sounds of panic resulting from ill news.

Then the hurrying of men who came, carrying torches from their fires, running towards the stairs; some dragged great stones, others spades and various tools. More and more they came, passing into the outer cave towards Jacobites' Glen.

Mogs rocked the child. The little fire burned low. Any glancing towards the group would have taken her for the mother with her children around her.



"Go and see," she urged. "I am afraid!"

How busy those gipsies were! Toni had awakened and rubbed his eyes. Mogs whispered to him.

"Go and see," she urged. "I am afraid. It seems as if *Giorgians* were in the glen."

The boy, half asleep, scrambled up and followed

the others towards the stair. It was some time before he came back, but he brought news.

"Some one has opened the secret way," he said, "and then fled back to tell others. Dono thinks it is the Indian who brought the child. They are very angry. If he comes they will kill him or any one else."

Mogs laid her finger on her lips. Her heart beat wildly.

The Indian who brought the child.

So Barry was here !

"Hist, Toni," she urged, "I am afraid. They are so angry, even Mother Rachel could not save me at this moment. I must come with the tribe if they go away. Another day I will tell them I am Pernillia, the little sister."

The boy, seeing his mother resting, the tiny babe asleep, and the speaker gipsy-clad and plausible, nodded his curly head.

"You are Pernillia," he repeated, "gipsy-favoured. Alloh ! But if you come with the tribe, which surely leaves Culloch at dawn, you will not come back."

Mogs laughed.

"Oh, no," she replied, "I shall not come back. And before we start we shall eat."

The boy clucked with his tongue.

"We shall eat ! We shall eat !" he agreed. "The tribe is rich to-day. The little sister knows, for she shared the gold."

Poor Penny! How she would have shuddered at those words.

But Mogs was smiling. Toni had not grasped that she was only the friend of Pernillia. And, *would he be waking Barry?*

Presently the men came trooping back, talking in great excitement. They had blocked the secret entrance. The *Giorgians* would *not* be finding the way down to Gipsy-town, but the betrayer must be discovered.

There was work, however, besides the search for the betrayer. Though it was long before dawn the packing of their household goods must be continued.

The woman woke up presently and took the baby. She was not so tired, and the baby was better. The little family trio looked at Mogs and smiled.

The gipsy-favoured *Giorgian* was all but Romany in name, and was welcomed to the family party. The husband and father was absent, it appeared. He had gone on with others to the old Brick House in Devonshire.

It would be a long journey which began at dawn.

Mogs ate her breakfast without inquiring too closely as to what it was or where it came from. The long drink of milk refreshed her. She was Oliver Cromwell, ready for battle.

The woman willingly gave her the baby whilst Toni led the donkey over to have its panniers packed:

Zillah began to dance and strike her tambourine.

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Gipsies did not take even such a flitting seriously.

It was when they were about to join the main body of the tribe that Mogs's great moment came.

Then the woman, lifting aside the coats, stooped to take the child who lay beneath in her arms.

It was Barry. • •

Mogs trembled. The poor little fellow had evidently been drugged, and as the woman lifted him his head fell heavily on to her shoulder.

Poor, poor little Barry.

Yet it was almost as well that he could not recognize her. Zara made room for him in one of the panniers.

As she did so two of the gipsy men came in to speak to her. They were still excited and in great haste.

Mogs crept as near to the pannier as she could.

Barry had been wrapped in a ragged coat over his pyjamas; his hair and face had been stained, but his curls had not been cut. Evidently the gipsies had little fear of pursuit at the moment, for even the boy's legs and hands had been left unstained.

One of the men came over and looked at him and spoke to the woman. Then they went back to the busier cave.

Zara fetched milk, and, holding Barry's head, made him drink.

He opened his eyes wearily and looked around him.

"Kirstie," he lisped. "Muvver." Then he drowsed off.

Mogs had kept in the background. She was terrified that the poor little lad would waken enough for him to recognize her.

Some one was shouting from near by. The exodus from Gipsy-town had begun. It was time for them to follow.

Mogs's fears reawakened. The woman left the baby in her care as she led the donkey through the caves.

Zillah and Toni danced and capered about, glad to be leaving the caves where they had been cooped up ever since the robbery at the Castle.

Mogs did not like the look of the majority of the crowd.

Dark, cruel faces looked into hers. Blear eyes blinked at her, others stared boldly as if questioning for her name.

But they saw Zara's baby in her arms, heard Zillah calling to her affectionately, and ceased to trouble.

The greatest danger lay with the old gipsy leader Mother Judith and her son Jacob.

Mogs saw them in front and trembled. She guessed they would be watching each and all as they passed out.

She gave the baby a gentle shake and it awoke crying. She lifted its little dark face to the level

of her own and was kissing it as she passed the group at the entrance. She dared not look to see if she were being noticed, but walked on, thankful that her name had not been called.

They were climbing a hill now, out from the river-side cave from the cunningly concealed entrance, the secret of which Mogs had not noticed.

It was dark still, though in the east a grey dawn was breaking.

CHAPTER. XXV

A GIPSY FLITTING

AS the cold November breeze stung her face Mogs felt it was easier to think.

Her head had been in a whirl of confusion, now she became alert, ready, and watchful for her chance.

Her fear still was that Barry would awake.

The woman had claimed her child, and Mogs walked beside the pannier whilst Toni led the donkey.

It promised to be a dull, dark day, and Mogs prayed for the mists to gather.

If so, she might lift Barry out of his resting-place and carry him to some hiding-place, praying that they would not be missed at once.

But at the moment the wind was too high for the fog to gather, though everything was saturated with moisture, and walking was not easy to Mogs.

Zillah still capered to and fro, chasing other youngsters, and Mogs was glad of it. If fellow gipsies came to speak to them, they would not question or look at her too closely.

The woman Zara had hushed the baby to sleep,

and began to ask questions as she walked by Mogs's side.

She explained, too, that her man was not in favour with the others, since he had had a fight with one of the leaders and broken the other's jaw.

That explained why Zara and her children seemed aloof. But presently other women came up, one wanted to see the *Giorgian* boy, asking questions which Zara could not reply to.

"Ask Mother Judith. It was she who bargained with the Indian," was all she could say.

Then as Mogs felt discovery to be imminent, there rose screaming from a party ahead and the women hurried off.

So they travelled on, till day had come and Mogs saw around her nothing but hills and dales, moors and mists.

Yes, the hilltops were covered by mists, which might descend and so give her the covert she needed.

Presently Barry roused and pushed aside the covering.

"Barry's hungry," he said; "he wants his brekkus."

He did not seem frightened now. Probably this strange mode of travel amused him, or the drug still clogged his brain. He ate the great hunk of bread offered him without complaint, asked for Kirstie and his mother, then rested back.

Mogs saw Jacob in the distance and shivered.

If he came back to where they were she felt sure those fierce black eyes would read her secret.

As a matter of fact she made a better gipsy than she had any idea of, and Zara was content with her story that she was Pernillia, the gipsy-favoured, who at their first halting would seek Mother Judith.

She spoke to Mogs of this, and the latter agreed; but the question decided her. She must take a risk.

"The little *Giorgian* would be better walking," she declared. "See, the mists gather, we may soon have to camp."

"It is true," agreed Zara, and then Zillah came dancing up with a question, and Toni began wrangling with his sister about leading the donkey.

Mogs seized her chance.

Lifting Barry, still half asleep, out of his "nest," she set him on his feet.

The boy looked at her, but did not recognize her.

"Who's you?" he asked, but she only laughed.

The woman had been looking, and nodded, smiling.

"The poor Jerry will carry a lighter load," said she, and Zillah began to beg for a ride.

Mogs dropped slightly in the rear.

If Jacob Smith came back now all was lost.

But the mists were drawing down. Great billowing clouds swept over the hills till they looked like night-capped dwarfs squatting around to watch.

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Barry dragged against Mogs's hand. He was weak and tired, poor little boy, and began to whimper.

Taking a risk she picked him up, cuddling him. He was no light weight, but Mogs was strong—and desperate.

Toni had run up, helping to chase a runaway colt.

The mists were so near, and Zillah was still arguing with her mother. They were almost the last in the weird procession.

"Toni," sang Mogs, and began to run. She had the appearance of pursuing Toni.

Zillah clapped her hands, thinking she was bringing the boy back to help.

The mists were folding them round at last, and Mogs ceased to run.

"Barry," she said, "don't you know Mogs?"

The mists hid her gipsy dress, but the child recognized the familiar voice and flung his arms about her.

"Take Barry home to brekkus, dear Mogs," he pleaded. "Barry am vewwy hungry."

"You shall have the biggest breakfast, darling," laughed Mogs, "but first we are playing a game. The naughty people want to catch us and say we are *not* to have breakfast. It's hide-and-seek, Barry. Promise to do just what Mogs says or you won't have *any* breakfast, and you might get a beating."

Barry clung closer.

"It was de black man," he whispered fearfully.

"Barry had a dedful dweam about de black man, and ven—and ven when Barry woke some one gave him nasty medicine—and vat's 'all I does 'member."

"Well, we aren't going to dream ugly dreams now," replied Mogs cheerily. "We're going to have breakfast, but Mogs has to go slowly, because the ground is *very* sloshy and—and we won't talk, Barry, because we're running away."

"We *won't* talk, because we are running away," the little boy echoed, and laid his head on Mogs's shoulder.

Mogs was as sure-footed and sturdy as any of the moorland ponies, but she was heavily handicapped. Barry seemed to grow heavier and heavier, the ground grew boggier and boggier.

More than once she halted, her pulses racing, as she thought she saw the gigantic shadows of men looming around.

But her worst fear was that the mists should rise.

Then, standing still to listen, she did hear voices—many voices—and wondered in horror if she had strayed back to the gipsy "flitting."

A rock stood near, many rocks in a small cairn. She crouched behind the biggest, making Barry cuddle close. . . . It was a relief to have him out of her arms if only for a few minutes.

A man's figure came out of the mists, black and indistinguishable, but she heard the peculiar call—and a voice shouting to "Dan ! Dan !"

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Yes, the gipsies had missed her. They were searching for "Pernillia" and the boy.

And if the mists cleared she *must* be discovered. It was half an hour at least before she dared move.

Barry was sobbing in a quiet, pathetic little way. He was *so* hungry and had such a headache.

"You *isn't* a kind Mogs," he accused. "You isn't giving a poor ickle boy any brekkus. Barry won't love you not the teeniest bit. He wants Gaby, not Mogs."

The ingratitude of it hurt Mogs, even though he was only a baby after all.

"Oh, Barry," she sobbed, "*I'm* hungry too. I—I . . ."

Barry's generous little heart was touched at once. Reaching up he patted his companion's face.

"Dear, sweet Mogs," he crooned. "Barry didn't mean it. Barry'll give you a lubly brekkus wif an egg and storberry jam."

"Darling," gulped Mogs, "then we'll go on this moment minute, won't we, till we find it."

"We'll go on vis moment minute till we find it," shouted Barry, and Mogs shuddered for fear he had been overheard.

But the mists still clung to the wet earth, and very slowly, very wearily, the two fugitives plodded on.

Barry had to be carried at last, he was even too tired to ask about breakfast, whilst Mogs herself



She crouched, making Barry cuddle close.

was too tired to care that the mists *had* risen now . . . showing the wet, dreary moorland, the brown hillocks, distant cattle . . . and, oh joy! a little grey farmhouse quite close to where they stood. Not a sign of the gipsy flitting. Not a sign of the moorland road, but—a house—a farm—friends at last.

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In husky tones Mogs cried the news to the child in her arms.

"Breakfast, Barry," she sang. "Oh, breakfast and a fire, and help. We—we are going to be safe at last."

He tried to rouse himself, poor bairn, to echo her gleeful cry.

"Brekкус," he chuckled, "an lotta, lotta egg and bacons an' porridge."

The barking of a collie held no fears for Mogs, she was pressing towards her Mecca, Barry clutched frantically now in her arms.

Yes, there was a man, not a gipsy this time but a bearded farmer, who stared at her with a frown of disapproval.

"Nae gipsies here, lass," he shouted. "Nae thievin' rascals come near Mattock Farm. Gang your way, ye'll nae get bite here."

It was too cruel, too terrible. Mogs stood, staring, Barry was slipping from her arms.

"But I'm *not* a gipsy," cried Mogs pitifully. "I—I am Margaret Gordon, and this, and this is Barry—he was . . ."

Then she collapsed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHERE WAS MOGS

MOGS had vanished.

Of course every one understood what had happened, even without Penny's sobbing tale.

"Mogs came to me," moaned Penny, when morning showed the bed unslept in and Mogs's own outer garments tossed on the bed.

"She—she asked me for my gipsy dress. It was hidden in my chest of drawers. No one but Mogs knew I had it. Mogs helped me. Mogs is my friend. I—I ought to have stopped her, but I was nearly asleep, I expect. And I couldn't say no to Mogs."

Poor Mrs. Hinford was actually in tears herself. This was the last straw—and Mrs. Lysden would be coming for Barry to-day.

It was excusable if Miss Alys *was* guilty of agreeing with Miss Dane and the other governesses that Mrs. Lysden ought never to have brought her troubles, whatever they were, to Culloch House.

But blaming Mrs. Lysden did not help to find Mogs.

It was Sara who, with Gaby, came to give definite information.

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“Mogs must have gone to the gipsies,” she said, “or she would not have wanted Penny’s gipsy dress.”

Mrs. Hinford put her hand to her head.

“*What*,” she asked, “had Pernillia to do with the gipsies? I know quite a number of the girls had their fortunes told. I blame Mademoiselle there for her foolish superstitions, but Penny says she had a gipsy costume, she spoke of a charm . . .”

“Here is Mary Ann,” said Sara in relief as Mary Ann appeared in the doorway. “She will tell you why Penny was called Pernillia.”

Mrs. Hinford had need of all her patience that day.

She had already rung up the police; she could see Alec and his father coming towards the house, whilst confronting her were three girls who apparently had strange revelations to make.

Mary Ann told the story of Pernillia’s christening and gipsy gratitude very simply.

“Penny gave the ‘charm’ to Mogs last night as well as the dress,” she added; “at least, Penny did not get out of bed, but Mogs took them. Penny is terribly cut up, and please don’t be angry with her.”

“I am not—angry,” said Mrs. Hinford, “only very, very worried. Now, Sara, tell me your tale as well as Mary Ann has told hers.”

“Mogs must have had some clue she did not

tell us," said Sara, "for Miss Alys and we met her coming back alone from the secret passage. She spoke of running away from a gipsy then, but would not tell the whole tale. She's not a talker, and—you know, Mrs. Hinford—she and I had secrets."

The headmistress nodded. Would she ever learn the truth, or understand all this tangle of events and happenings.

"Mogs must have believed Barry was in the hands of the gipsies," said Sara. "How or *why* he got in their clutches we don't know. We are only thinking of Mogs. She got Penny's clothes and her charm, then she went out through the secret entrance which Mustog Ali had used earlier. And we believe she *must* have gone alone down the secret staircase to Gipsy-town."

• Mrs. Hinford closed her eyes.

• "My *dears*," she urged, "don't talk nonsense. No one *but* the gipsies have ever found any entrance to a fabled hiding-place."

"*That*," said Sara triumphantly, "is what we have come to tell you. *We* found it, only we dared not go down."

Miss Alys had come quietly into the room, followed by three visitors—the minister, Alec, and the inspector.

It appeared that Alec too had told the story of Jacobites' Glen, and his father had come up to the school with him at once.

Alec looked very white and anxious. He was blaming himself. After all, he had been the only boy, and he ought not to have allowed these girls to get into danger.

The inspector had to hide a smile, though he pitied the grey-haired mistress who listened in such horror to the "adventure" of Jacobites' Glen, though she sighed in relief on hearing that her pupils had stopped short of penetrating into those mysterious depths.

But the clue was a useful one, and Alec had the task of leading a party of men to the glen where Jacobite Jennie had given her warning cry.

Alas ! those gipsies had done their work only too well, and so secretly and cleverly was the entrance blocked by rock and earth that few of the searchers believed Alec's tale that there had ever been a secret stair leading down to subterranean caves.

" Nightmare, laddie. Midsummer dreams," they told him, till Alec could have screamed in anger.

Inspector Bailey declared indeed that the gipsies had never been in great force in the neighbourhood. No "camp" had been pitched, and the men and women who for a time had haunted glen and moors were only wanderers from the Border tribes who were, or had been, only here with intent to rob on a large scale.

Alec went back to Culloch House with the inspector whilst his father returned to his duties.

Mrs. Lysden had just arrived with her husband, so Mary Ann whispered to him.

Sara and Gaby were in Mrs. Hinford's room with them.

"Do come and see Penny," pleaded Mary Ann. "Wanda is with her up in the gallery. The other girls are all at lessons, but we have a holiday. Topsy is human, and she knows we simply could not concentrate on any sort of lesson. I—I think Miss Barker really ought to see Penny, who is in an awful state of nerves and hysteria."

Alec felt extremely doubtful of his rôle. Would he be expected to pour jugs of cold water over the hysterical Pernillia, or bully her?

He found the two girls alone in the alcove of the gallery. Wanda looked intensely relieved to see them. Penny crouched, her face hidden, her shoulders heaving.

Alec groaned.

"She is terrified of something or some one," whispered Wanda, drawing them on one side, "and keeps jumbling up gipsies, police, the Mingletons, and Mogs. I think she ought to see a doctor."

But Penny must have heard the last word and dragged herself up.

"No, *no*," she pleaded, "don't send for a doctor, don't send for any one. I—I'd rather *die*."

"Nonsense," retorted Alec, who had plenty of

common sense and was in a hurry to finish a difficult job. "You need not die at all. Be a sport, Penny, old bean, and just get the whole thing off your chest. That is what will help you and help us.

"Tell us the whole story and we give our word we won't tell any one if you forbid us. You're one of our crowd, and we are loyal. Come, buck up. *You are going to help Mogs.*"

He had put the whole matter in a nutshell with those last words. Penny ceased to sob and her chin went up.

The three who stood before her were friends. And she needed friends badly.

"Hold my hand, Mary Ann," she said with a gasp; "hold it tight, and if—and if—you don't think any one will forgive me just—all walk away. I'm going to shut my eyes whilst I tell my story."

"Cheerio," said Alec, "I knew you were a sport."

Mary Ann gave *his* hand a squeeze too. He had accomplished in five minutes what had been taking them hours.

Penny had begun her story. She spoke very slowly, almost like a person who had been hypnotized, but it was a straightforward tale in which she did not spare herself.

She told—poor Penny!—of her hatred of poverty. Her thrill at coming to such a splendid school, her longing to be as big as any one else. She spoke—fiercely—of Mogs's kindness, her sympathy, and her



The three who stood before her were friends.

good advice. She told of how Gilda and Retta had taken her up, thinking she would be useful—and then of the gipsies. She spoke of Mother Judith's interest in the "charm," she told of the invitation to join a gipsy revel, how they had flattered and paid homage, telling her that being Pernillia she was one of themselves. They told her her will was law,

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that if she had a wish it was part of the gipsy covenant to help her gain it.

And she had told them of her poverty.

Penny's head drooped. They had been so eager to help, had told of Romany wealth, and how she had a right to the store they held. She had thrilled in the joy of having money to spend. Retta and Gilda had believed in the fable of a rich godfather who supplied her secretly with money. She had had her fling. The elder girls had helped her to get the dainty clothes she had always longed for. She lavished gifts on them, paid for amusements, and had, in fact, been Cinderella the Princess. Then—the gipsies had given her trinkets,—they had given that necklet of corals and brilliants which Mogs had seen her wear.

Mogs was in the story now, and Penny's listeners heard with admiration and wonder what Mogs had done, even to meeting Jacob Smith and returning the necklace.

"*That,*" said Wanda, "was when we saw Mogs coming back through the secret entrance."

"*I wonder,*" said Alec, "what happened when Mogs saw Jacob Smith, or if she went anywhere near the Stone House and saw the Indian."

"She was terribly, terribly worried," said Penny. "I am sure Jacob frightened her."

"And yet," added Alec in stifled tones, "she has gone to the rescue of Barry."

"Will I," sobbed Penny, "have to go to prison?"

Mary Ann flung her arms round her.

"*Darling*," she pleaded, "of course not. You didn't know who the necklace belonged to. But—oh, Alec and Wanda, don't you agree? *We* ought to go and tell Mrs. Hinford—and the Mingletons."

"Yes," said Alec, "we ought."

Wanda did a kind thing.

"I'll stay with old Penny, then," she said cheerily. "We'll go along to Winks's room and sit over the fire. Come on, Penny. It's all over and done with, and you mustn't be afraid any more."

But Penny's eyes were still wide with trouble.

"If only—Mogs comes back," she whispered.

And Mary Ann was not jealous this time, only grateful to the girl who had stood so loyally by her first friend.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE TRAIL

MRS. HINFORD'S expression said, "Please don't give me any more shocks," as she listened to the tale Mary Ann insisted on telling herself.

Mrs. Lysden and a tall, handsome man in the early thirties were standing near. Mrs. Lysden greeted both Mary Ann and Alec with kindly smiles, but her face was tear-stained, and her eyes told of the grief she tried to hide.

Sara and Gaby had gone to put on their hats and coats as it had been decided to go again to the Storr House. Malcolm Lysden felt there might be some shed or outhouse where the Indian had hidden his boy.

Poor man ! he looked thin and ill. The shock of hearing of his brother's death and his son's disappearance came as a heavy blow after the cruel strain of prison life and recent illness.

Yet he tried to tell Alec and Mary Ann how grateful he was to them all.

Then back came the others, and the Lysdens turned to Mrs. Hinford.

Might they, they asked, take some of these comrades with them in their search ?

But Sara was whispering to Alec, and shook her head when Mrs. Lysden looked towards her.

"If Mary Ann likes," said Sara, "Alec and I will go and tell Mrs. Mingleton about Penny. She said we were to ask for anything we wanted, and Penny must need forgiveness so tremendously."

So it was settled. Mary Ann slipped away upstairs to tell Penny all would be well, whilst Gaby went with the Lysdens, leaving Sara and Alec to go on their mission of "confession."

"Be back in good time, *please*," urged Mrs. Hinford. "Though the early fog has cleared it may come on again, and I confess I feel very nervous."

Mrs. Lysden took her hand.

"I am so much to blame," she whispered; "but oh, pray heaven, one day we will repay."

A small car was waiting for them outside. From the Stone House it would be necessary to motor on to the nursing home at Dorloch, but they promised to be home for the school dinner.

"And you two will not be far," said Mrs. Hinford, looking at Sara and Alec.

Sara sighed.

"I *daren't* make promises if it means finding Mogs. and Barry," she replied, "but I'm not likely to find them at the Castle, am I? Only, if I don't get back to dinner, *don't* worry. We—we promise not to do anything *wrong*."

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The phone was ringing madly, and Mrs. Hinford turned to take down the receiver.

Afterwards, poor woman, she blamed herself for not making Sara the wangler be definite in her promise.

There was no difficulty to-day in finding entrance to the Castle.

Mrs. Mingleton and Peter both met them in the hall. They had heard wild rumours of trouble at the school, and had been debating as to whether they could ring up and offer assistance.

"Come into my room, children, and tell me all about it," said Mrs. Mingleton in her breeziest tones, and for once her listeners scarcely noticed the unintentional insult. Children indeed!

Alec had to be spokesman here. He had had the tale pat from Penny herself, and Mrs. Mingleton listened with close attention.

To give her credit, she thought far less of her jewels than of Mogs and Barry.

"We must let the inspector know," she said; but before she had time to get through to the police station, Peter, who had left the room, came hurrying back.

"Denton beckoned me," he said breathlessly; "he came up in the police car. They've got the word at Dorloch of a big gipsy flitting, going south. The inspector at Dorloch, who has been keen on the jewel robbery and always suspected the gipsies were

still about, is phoning through to the nearest station on the gipsies' route. They hope to be up with them by early afternoon, or even soon after midday."

Mrs. Mingleton clapped her hands, whilst Sara gasped out a question :

"Do you—oh, *do* you think, Mogs and Barry will be there with them ?"

It was a question no one could answer, but Mrs. Mingleton rang up Culloch House at once.

Mrs. Hinford was delighted. Here was hope on the horizon. Mrs. Mingleton struck whilst the iron was hot.

"May we keep your Sara to lunch ?" she asked. "I am phoning to Mr. Fannock about Alec, and if you like you can send over the Lysdens."

Leave was granted for Sara, but Mrs. Hinford was uncertain when the Lysdens would be back. They had to go on to Dorloch, and, of course, they were making their own inquiries about Mustog Ali.

"We seem to have plenty on our plate," smiled Mrs. Mingleton. "What about a spot of lunch now ? Half-past eleven—and you young people had breakfast early. We may be too busy to eat later on, eh ?"

It was well planned, and though Sara at first felt too excited even to eat hashed venison and orange soufflé, she found her appetite.

Once again the phone. Once again the Dorloch

police ringing up. It appeared the Lysdens were in the office with him and he had, alas! nothing but bad news.

A number of police had stopped the gipsy flitting, but after a very exhaustive search no trace had been found of either Mogs or Barry, though a woman of the tribe had tried to convey a hint that they had been with them earlier.

Mrs. Lysden got through herself after the inspector had finished. She was evidently in great distress, and said she and her husband were hiring a bigger car and then starting in pursuit of the gipsies, but intended calling back first at Culloch House to speak to Penny, possibly to ask her to come with them.

Peter pushed back his chair.

"Mater," said he, "Paul won't want me this afternoon as he has you and dad. What about it? Shall I take Sara and Alec in the car and head the chase, strike the gipsy trail, and score one up against those fat-head police?"

His mother laughed.

"Go, you boy," she said. "Good idea! But don't dare return without them."

I am afraid Sara entirely forgot the feelings of Mrs. Hinford.

It was not the cheeriest of days for a motor spin, and I am afraid Paul's accident had not taught his twin carefulness in driving.

They just *buzzed* along, up hill, down dale.
But never a sign did they get of the gipsy sitting.
Then a tyre burst, and Peter was out at once.
So were Sara and Alec, longing to help and not succeeding. Alec was able to do small jobs, but Sara, impatient, moved away. A boy sat swinging his legs on a rock near, a black-haired, dark-skinned laddie.

Sara dived in her pocket and found a shilling. She had an idea the boy *might* be—gipsy, though there were many sun-blackened boys to be seen after a hot summer.

The boy took the coin and grinned.

"What's your name?" asked Sara.

He grinned again.

"Toni, lady," he whined. "Tell your hand, lady, for . . ."

Sara gasped. He *was* a gipsy.

She dived again and produced a florin.

"How far have the gipsies travelled?" she asked.

He eyed her curiously, then shrugged.

"Far, lady," he said. "Zillah and my mother and the little one are left behind. The *bambino* is very ill. They are there—in the cottage. Zillah came back with Jacob. There were those who were missing, and Zillah knew the place where she first missed Pernillia. They, Jacob and the others, search. Later we travel south."

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He had his eye on the florin as he spoke. Possibly he had reason for his confidences, since Jacob Smith and the other leaders had driven his mother from their ranks with hard words.

Sara was back by the car in a twink.

"I—I've *almost* found them," she panted; "the boy knows. He calls Mogs Pernillia. She ran away with Barry somewhere *here*. The gipsies are looking for them. Come."

Peter groaned.

"Can't leave the car, kid," he urged. "I've just got the tyre on—and if there are gipsies about they might find it the most useful thing in the world."

"Cut along with the boy. I'll wait—all ready. Car turned. If any police or the Lysdens' car comes along I'll send them on the trail."

It was wise counsel, and the others did not wait. Toni had slid from his rock and stood watching. He was, in his small way, a gambler with fate.

Alec was no millionaire, but he gave Toni a shilling.

"The boss there," he told the boy, pointing to Peter, "will give you big money if you will help us search. Have you any idea where those two, Pernillia and the kid, have gone?"

Toni grinned.

"There is Zillah," said he, pointing. "She has listened to Jacob and told me where the men of the

tribe *have been*. We will go where they have *not* been."

And he set off at a slinging trot with the two following, though less successful in avoiding the boggy land.

It was clear weather now, though dour and dark as November afternoons can be on these wild moors, and the boy Toni was soon leading over bleak stretches and round dreary hillocks till they reached sight of the same small farmstead Mogs had found shelter in not many hours previously.

This time a woman came to the door, staring at the gipsy boy so gloomily that Toni fled, with the fear of the law haunting him.

Alec did the speaking, and at his first words Mrs. Leslie gave an exclamation of relief.

Yes, the lassie and the bairn were here. The bairn was asleep, but the lassie was sick and lay in bed, too ill to gang anywhere.

But—found.

Sara gulped down her tears. Alec stood on the threshold and looked over the moors where gipsies were even now searching in vain.

It was Sara who followed upstairs to the stuffy, crowded room where Mogs lay with fever spots burning in her cheeks, and utter weariness in her eyes.

She smiled at Sara as if she had made sure of seeing her.

"Tell Mrs. Lysden, Barry is safe," she whispered.

"Darling," sobbed Sara, dashing aside her tears and giving the oddest grin.

"Do go," pleaded Mogs. "I—I'll have to stay here to-day. My legs are woolly. Take Barry—take Barry, and give them all my love."

Then Mrs. Leslie interfered.

"She's nae sae ill, but weerit oot," she explained; "it's rest and food the bairn needs. She couldna rise frae the bed any mair than a baby. But the wee laddie has waukit and is bonnie. I hae washed the filth frae his face, puir bairn. E-eh! but it's prison they gipsy carles need."

Barry recognized his friends and rushed to Sara.

"Mogs has gone by-byes," he said, "and Barry will go home to Kirstie. Mogs *will* come to-morrow day. And Barry *will* take the kitty cat."

He was quite annoyed when Mrs. Leslie explained that the kitty cat belonged here, but he got over the difficulty in serene faith.

"Then Barry *will* come to-morrow an' fetch Mogs an' kitty," he promised, raising his face for a kiss.

And as Mrs. Leslie said :

"Who could say nae to sic a bairn?"

The afternoon was closing in as they hurried back, Barry allowing Alec to carry him.



Tony was leading round dreary hillocks.

They were nearing the road where they left Peter when the sight of four ragged figures rounding a hillock near brought terror to the rescuers.

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It needed no second glance to recognize gipsies, and the latter lost no moment in their pursuit.

Barry, clutching Alec's hair, screamed in delight over the chase which he felt was part of a new play ; but the play might have had a grim ending had it not been that they were at last in sight of the road.

The road where ~~two~~ cars had drawn up side by side. The gipsies had seen that car, and swung round, no longer pursuers but pursued !

Men were running from the direction of the car, and a lady had reached the moorland track as Alec, closely followed by Sara, came stumbling along.

Barry was the first to recognize the advancing figure and wriggled to get down.

" My muvver ! " he screamed. " My muvver ! "

And the next minute he was in his mother's arms.

" Don't tell *me*," said Wanda firmly, " that it has been or is being a rotten term. I consider it has been topping."

Sara laughed joyously as she slipped her arm round Gaby.

" It is rather nice," she agreed ; " at least, this part is nice. I thought it jolly decent of the Lysdens to wait to give the Carnival Fête, or whatever you call it, till Mogs is well. Isn't it a scream ? Do you remember how we named her Oliver Cromwell the first evening of term ? and how she took care of

"Penny and Mary Ann from the start? Not that Mary Ann needed protecting for long."

"And Penny writes from home," said Mary Ann, "that she is quite well and going to come back to finish the term. She will be more Mogs's shadow than ever, but Mogs won't mind."

"She's not the sort to mind," agreed Sara, "she's splendid. *Really* a heroine, though not showy."

"More solid—like me," murmured Gaby, and, in the laugh that followed, graver thoughts were forgotten by the little band who awaited the coming of their chum—the Queen of Revels.

A very stolid queen, not in the least anxious to be a prominent figure in that gala evening.

Whilst her chums waited, Mogs was speaking to those two grateful friends, Malcolm and Mrs. Lysden.

Mogs, a little paler than usual, a little less like Oliver Cromwell in sturdiness, but quiet and brave-eyed as ever, was trying to explain that there was nothing to thank her for.

"*Nothing?*" said Mrs. Lysden. "My dear, how can I ever thank you and those wonderful comrades to whom I owe my happiness to-day? But to you—oh, Mogs!—I can't think what it might have been without our heroine."

"Don't," pleaded Mogs, as Malcolm Lysden added his husky word of gratitude too. "Don't you—you both see that there is absolutely no need

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to thank *me*. Sara and the others did everything—you know they did."

"And—Barry?" whispered Mrs. Lysden.

Mogs smiled.

"But *I* loved Barry too," she replied; and at that moment a shrill little voice was heard calling, small steps came pattering, and the door was flung open by an imperious hand.

"*I* want my Mogs," said Barry. And Mogs, forgetful of gratitude or thanks, fell on one knee, opening her arms wide to enfold—the hero of the day.

THE END

